

木村心一

Shinichi Kimura

これは
ゾンビ
ですか？

5 ああ、マイダーリンはロクデナシ



ファンタジア文庫

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Is This a
Zombie?

Let's
try a
verse!

Dai-Sensei ▶

The light
summer grass
And the sight
of brave heroes
Maybe in
swimsuits...

by
Orito

▲ Oo! This verse
highlights that
something strong-
looking can have a
cute side! That's a
cool mismatch!

◀ In other words, you
shouldn't ever let down
your guard just based
on appearances, right?
That's what this verse
is saying.

If you really met
Winnie the Pooh
in real life
You'd take off
running

by
Haruna





In the midst
of autumn,
For some
reason, I can
see
Bloomers
next to me
by
Orito



▲ Seriously!
I want to know what
those bloomers are
for too!

◀ **Taeko**

Don't you
dare think that
Characters
can be defined
Based on
clothes alone!
by
Haruna



▲ The riposte
here works well.
Don't you ever
think that
everything would
be better in a
maid uniform or
bloomers?



A snowy morning
G-shirts
glitter in the air
Sounds of
nabe stew

by
Orito

◀ Oo! This verse
is also amazing! I
can see the scene
perfectly even if I
close my eyes!

◀ Kyouko

Hey there
Satoshi
Oops, I think
I got that
wrong
My apologies

by
Haruna

◀ Makes you
think about the
awkwardness
of mistaking
someone for
someone else.
If you can't just
say sorry, then
it might become
something like
this.

Yuu▶

Just you
sit and
watch!
Here's my
ultimate
attack!
Fufufufu...

by
Haruna



◀ You could say this is biting social commentary aimed at modern businesses. You shouldn't let others know what kinds of secret moves you have in your repertoire.

Calming winds
of spring
Go forth and
reach the
people
And their
glasses too

by
Orito



▶ What a refreshing verse this is! Agh! You a genius or something?!

Ayumu: I just have no idea. Honestly, all of these suck so much that I can't really decide a winner.
Haruna: Huh? You tryin' to pick a fight with me? They call me the "Haiking," you know!
Orito: Whoa there, don't forget me! My nickname is "If you want to sell your bike, go to Haiku-king"! (1)
Tomonori: Yeah, Aikawa! These haikus are amazing!
Sera: The more sublime your work is, the more criticism it draws. Such things can't be helped.
Ayumu: Actually, that's the biggest mystery. Why do you like these things so much?!

Haruna: So, this is my win, right?!

Orito's haikus have too many mistakes!

Orito: No, this is my win! Who the hell is Satoshi anyways?!

Ayumu: Hm, let's see here... looks like you'll see this battle continue in this volume... wait, we're seriously going to drag this out?!

(1) Reference to a commercial

◀ These illustrations// don't really relate at all// to the main story. Even though I thought it'd be interesting... (oops too many syllables)





First, I want to say one thing: "Promises are meant to be kept."

There are plenty of people who follow the rules of society but don't think twice before breaking promises. And I think this kind of "rules > promises" trend is pretty weird.

Well, no, it's clear we should try to follow the rules too, but there are plenty of things that are hard to accept or just plain hard to understand.

For example, when someone tells you that you can't go to a mixer unless you bring a cute girl with you...

Prologue - If You Fill Your Mind With Dirty Thoughts, Even the Greatest Hardships Will Cause You no Suffering¹

I sighed and watched my breath fog up the air in front of me. I was wearing a jersey on top of two other layers, yet I still felt cold. That was the kind of winter day it was.

Today we were doing marathon training in gym class.

We were running around a graveyard that was a three-minute walk from our school and then running back to the school gate. The students had dubbed this the ``grave-visiting course," and we had to do it three times.

People who completed the course could take the rest of the period as free time, so there were students who ran as fast as they could. Of course, there were also people who took their sweet time walking the course. I was part of the latter group.

The day was mostly sunny with an occasional cloud. And I might look like a normal first-year high school student, but I was also a zombie.

Under that sun, I didn't have the energy to try and impress everyone by running the course really quickly.

I adjusted my pace so that I would finish a lap every hour and timed my walks with when the sun was hidden behind a cloud.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spied a single bespectacled guy with spiky hair, stooped over and doing a Kin-chan sprint².

His name was ``Orito." He was the biggest pervert in our entire school, and he was running all weird and sideways like that because he wanted to be able to wholly enjoy both the view of the bouncing breasts of the girls behind him and the waving butts of the girls in front of him with minimal effort on his part.

To think he could still have the energy to do that in this damn cold. Everyone else was so sluggish, but he was there and out of breath (but not for the right reason).

¹This is a spoof on an actual Japanese saying, ``if you clear your mind of all obstructive thoughts, even the greatest hardships will cause you no suffering."

²[Enjoy the image.](#)

“If you fill your mind with dirty thoughts, even the greatest hardships will cause you no suffering.”

I thought back to the day those words had come out of his stupid, annoying mouth.

Did he mean that when you were really absorbed into something, you tended to forget all about the bad things in life? I had no idea. However, you could also take those words as a pure affirmation of all things perverted, and I was getting first-hand proof right now that he meant what he said... well, whatever. I really don't care what that spiky-haired idiot does.

Now then. Maybe I should actually try to run a bit. But just as I thought that...

“Whaaat are you doing Aikawa~~? I caught up to you! If you're gonna dawdle like that I'll win the entire championship!”

I heard an energetic voice calling to me.

... There isn't such a thing as a gym championship, idiot.

I already knew who was calling out to me, so I didn't bother to turn around.

“Hey, Tomonori.”

That's all I said back.

At any rate, I was sure that there was a girl behind me with an idiotic grin on her face, and she was probably now going to tell me to not call her Tomonori.

“Don't call me Tomonori~~! It makes me sound like a guy!”

This girl who sprinted up to me like she was running a 100-meter dash was named “Yoshida Yuki.”

However, because of how tomboyish she was, everyone teased her by calling her Tomonori, which was another way to pronounce the kanji in her name. In fact, around eighty percent of the people who knew her called her Tomonori.

“Just give it up. Not gonna happen.”

Things that were already well-established were not going to get overturned that easily.

“I'm not givin' up! I'll make everyone call me Yuki one day!”

“You're pretty excitable today. Did something good happen?”

I glanced at her, seeing a short-haired girl wearing a jersey and shorts giving me a huge innocent smile like she was some little boy making a big castle in a sandbox.

She didn't seem short of breath at all, but bounced up and down by my side.

“Yeah! I'm just having so so so much fun! Running is so much fun, isn't it?! Doesn't Aikawa think so too?”

“I... don't think so at all.”

“Why, Aikawa~~? Come on, let's run together! Let's dash into the evening sun!”

“The evening sun isn't even out right now. How can they expect us to do a marathon in the middle of this damn cold? How many laps have you run?”

“This is my fifth! I'm super in the lead right now, ya know!”

Well, that's probably because nobody else cared enough to run more than three laps. Also, I remembered that Tomonori was on the track team. She certainly was an athlete with a bright future.

Well, she was a blood-sucking ninja, so if she used that supernatural strength of hers then she should be able to win at the national championships. Assuming there aren't any other monsters or vampire ninjas participating, that is.

Other than vampire ninjas, there were plenty of other supernatural beings in this world.

There were the masou shoujo, who came from the magic world Virie, and there were the Megalo, who came from the Underworld, where the dead resided.

I dropped my gaze, and got a view of a dazzling leg stretching from Tomonori's shorts.

... Seriously, that was almost blindingly bright. Her skin was so pale and

beautiful that I wouldn't be surprised if she told me she had used bleach.

I see. So the track team didn't wear jersey pants, but wore shorts instead. Although, I'd prefer if the girls in gym wore bloomers more than shorts...

Girls sure seemed to have softer skin than boys. Maybe I only thought that because I was a zombie? Or maybe all high school boys thought like that?

“But it sure is cold today...”

I looked up at the clouds. That winter sky really did seem to be in a grumpy mood.

“Cold weather is perfect for marathons! What's with you, Aikawa? You've been doing nothing but sighing.”

“Well... your little ‘cold weather is perfect for marathons’ reasoning is why I'm sighing...”

“Actually, I'm curious why I always want to run marathons when it's winter. I really don't know why.”

“Well, when it's not winter it can get pretty hot, and you can get heatstroke, dehydrated, and other stuff like that. Maybe that's why?”

“Aikawa, I know how good you are at English, but come on, talk in Japanese~~.”

“Each and every word I said was in Japanese... in other words, when you run you start feeling hot. Summers here are really hot, right?”

“Ohh! Yeah, that's true! Amazing, Aikawa! Are you a genius?!”

No, it's not like I'm a genius, or a mighty dead person who had a halo over his head or anything like that³. Tomonori seemed like she had just taken a critical hit out of the blue, though, that or her eyes had been opened to a world of possibilities... in either case, it sufficed to say she was deeply impressed.

“By the way, have you gotten any leads on Chris?”

I started walking again while speaking in the tone you might be able to find

³I am not familiar with the show so I can't really expand further, but I'm almost positive this is a Dragonball reference.

coming out of a division chief in an old detective drama.

Tomonori's expression sobered and she began walking slowly next to me.

“No, there hasn't been much new info about her.”

She clasped both her hands behind her head and looked up at the sky while speaking lazily.

“I see...”

Tomonori was trying to find clues to locate Chris, the masou shoujo who was revived during the school festival.

Just a normal zombie high school student like me wasn't skilled enough to track people down.

But, Tomonori was a ninja. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that when anyone mentioned information gathering, the first thing that came to most people's minds were either ninjas or spies.

However, you could tell from how Tomonori talked that she wasn't too bright. So, I really wasn't expecting too much out of her.

There was another vampire ninja I knew in our school. I really didn't want to go to her for help though...

“Ah, that's Sarasvati over there, isn't it?”

Speak of the Devil, I now noticed one girl walking towards the school.

It was already in the middle of fourth period, but she was clearly just arriving. Maybe she was trying to be fashionably late, or was playing hooky.

Her tight, slender legs were wrapped in black stockings. Maybe she wanted to highlight her long, beautiful legs, or maybe high school girls these days were just way too daring, but she was wearing an extremely short skirt.

She had long, silky hair down to her hips. Her features were fair and she had a mature air about her. She was also walking in our direction. She seemed to notice my presence, and the corners of her lips curled upwards.

However, I never called out to her and just passed her by.

“Hm? Aikawa. You're not gonna say hello?”

Tomonori seemed to find that so strange that she forgot to say anything to Saras herself and just continued to stick to my side.

“.....” I didn't answer her.

After the school festival, Saras had said the following to me: “Do you really intend on making me say that the shape of your butt is so irresistible to me?”

It was the lowest level love confession I'd ever heard, and I'm sure it was fairly unprecedented... but I couldn't help but get really self-conscious over it.

I wanted to thank her for risking her life for me, and I really should give her an answer, but I really didn't know how I should act around her right now.

A bit of time passed after we passed each other, but then Saras stopped and gracefully turned around.

“Hey, my darling.”

“Who the hell is that supposed to be?!”

I couldn't help shouting and then ended up turning towards Saras.

“Alright, Aikawa! Now we can both have weird nicknames!”

Tomonori was an idiot, so she didn't seem to understand what “darling” meant. She was the only person who stood there smiling.

“You meet your beloved after so long and yet do not greet her... what is the meaning of this? Huh? You bastard of a darling!”

“Anyways, please stop calling me that. I can feel chills running down my neck.”

“You were the one who ignored me.”

I let out a single sigh, and then weakly raised one hand.

“Yo. It's been a while. What are you doing? Is your body healed up now?”

Saras put a hand on her hip with a satisfied expression on her face, then

turned her nose up proudly. Her piercing eyes were turned up at the corners, but they showed no true hatred for me. Rather, they were more neutral.

“Thanks to everyone, all my wounds are completely healed. Also, let me answer your first question with a question. In your eyes, what exactly does it look like I'm doing?”

“Well, nothing special... coming to school?”

“How unexpected. That is correct.”

She gave me two claps.

She was acting surprised in order to make me look like an idiot, wasn't she?

“Sarasvati also skips school sometimes, I guess...”

Tomonori smiled, but Saras covered Tomonori's mouth with her hand.

“Do not call me by that name at school. Is your mind slower than that of a baboon?”

Vampire ninjas used false names at school, and Saras's was Hoshikawa Kirara. Tomonori's real name was actually Mael Strom. But I just found it all way too confusing and just used “Saras” and “Tomonori.”

“S-Sowwy...” Tomonori somehow managed to peel Saras's hand off her mouth, and took a few gasps for oxygen. Both Tomonori and I had already come to a complete stop.

“I was talking to Aikawa about this, but... did you find out anything about where Chris-sensei is?”

Tomonori asked that question with a smile, but Saras just glared back.

These two were both vampire ninjas, but they were in two different factions, so they probably didn't share information with each other. Geez, they were the same species, so they should just get along already.

Seeing no other option, I asked myself.

“Have you gotten any leads on Chris?”

“None at all. We have no idea what she wants to do.”

Saras was one of the leaders of the vampire ninjas. If Chris had injured anyone or made any flashy moves, she would've told me. Saras herself had been attacked by Chris, after all.

However... Chris's goal wasn't to defeat the vampire ninjas. She probably wouldn't attack the vampire ninjas any longer.

“Agh, now I'm getting sad! Where's Chris-sensei gone off to?!”

Tomonori messed with her hair and stamped her feet in frustration. I wasn't sure if she really held a grudge against Chris or not, but she continued to call her sensei.

“Actually, my darling. We vampire ninjas will be having an assembly soon.”

“Ah, I have one too!”

“Yes. Of course you would have one too. This will be the first meeting in a century where both the highest-ranking members in the conservative and reform factions of the vampire ninjas will meet under the same roof.”

“Eh?! That's what's happening?!”

Tomonori seemed completely taken aback by the importance of this assembly.

“So you guys all met in different places before?”

“Yes. Both factions have their own members who hand down commands, make decisions, and carry out orders.”

“So, why exactly is everyone suddenly meeting in the same place?”

“Hm. I was the one who suggested it. Since our previously dead chief is now alive and in good health, there is no reason for us to continue fighting. Well then, my darling. Will you not consider participating as well? Vampire ninjas working in various areas will be present. You may be able to acquire some useful information.”

“Participate at a vampire ninja assembly? Is that really alright?”

“Oh! That's a good idea! Aikawa, let's go together! She called it an assembly,

but it really isn't as stiff and formal as it sounds!"

"But I'm not a vampire ninja."

"Do not underestimate me. You are just one person, so we can manage."

"I see... well, in that case, I'd like to go."

"Oh! I'm sure we'll find a clue or something!"

"When's the assembly happening?"

"We still have yet to decide a date. After all, we are trying to call together many people who are busy with their own missions. Finding a schedule for this will be no easy task."

"Well, if you decide a date, let me know."

"I will. You should also pull yourself together and work harder at your training... my beloved darling."

Saras patted me on the shoulder, and I scratched my cheek.

"Stop calling me that! Well, I can't say I'm not happy about your confession, but... I'm..."

"I do not care about how you feel. I just know that I love you, so I'll continue to call you that."

"... You know, it's really hard to believe someone who throws around the word 'love' so easily..."

I... really didn't like people who forced their own feelings onto others. These vampire ninjas... they felt like they were always looking down on other people, or ignoring how other people felt. Well, no, Tomonori was a genuinely good person, but she also went around randomly calling me her husband...

Yeah. These people just had no restraint. I felt myself getting a tad annoyed.

"Don't worry, I am certain that someday my feelings will reach you."

I don't think that was something you normally said to the person you were aiming those feelings at...

I didn't really want to continue on this topic, so I didn't answer. Saras cocked her head to the side. She couldn't seem to understand that she was putting me into a bad mood.

“Well then, I suppose I shall leave now. Farewell, Yoshida Yuki... my rival.”

“Did you hear that, Aikawa?! She called me Yuki! ... Bye bye!!”

Tomonori was in high spirits as she waved her hands frantically at Saras. We did a lap around the graveyard and then began running back the way we came.

Along the way, we met Orito, who was running towards the graveyard in the same way as he had been running before. Wow, this guy just wouldn't give up. Was he chasing after tail again ?

Orito stopped for a moment and then began running alongside me and Tomonori. He probably just really wanted to see Tomonori's boobs sway from side to side.

“... What do you think you're doing?”

Even someone as gentle as Tomonori was showing displeasure here.

“Orito, you're in the way. Go away.”

I waved my hands widely to drive him away as he began jogging backwards in front of us.

“To me, Tomonori's boobs are the only boobs worth watching. They're worth a million dollars to me.”

Orito's glasses sparkled as he stared at Tomonori's chest. Tomonori raised both her hands into the air and shouted.

“I'm super flattered, you damn creep! Ugh, what do you waaaant~~?!”

“Well, winter break is soon, right? So, for Christmas...”

Orito suddenly put on a sad expression.

“Aikawa. Do you know what a ‘year-end whitewashing’ is?”

“Ah, you mean those year-end parties that salarymen have? What about them?”⁴

“Yup, that's the problem.”

“Huh?”

“Those parties are for salarymen. But why only salarymen? Why can't students also have a party at the end of the year to forget all our troubles?”

Well, there was the problem of not having money in our wallets and of not being able to drink alcohol legally... but otherwise, there wasn't a reason we couldn't do one too.

“Ohh! That's right! We also have a right to have a year-end whitewashing!”

“I'm also in favor of that.”

The person who mumbled that was a tall handsome guy who had just caught up to us from behind.

“Anderson-kun. Don't sneak up on us like a ninja.”

This basketball team member with a face befitting a British prince looked down at me with a kind smile.

“Let's do it. A year-end whitewashing.”

The handsome guy was shining with sweat. He was almost blindingly bright, as if a spotlight was shining on him.

I was a bit surprised that Anderson-kun and not Orito was the one who suggested that.

“Ah, then I'll join in too!”

A girl who was passing by us raised her hand. It was a tallish girl with her makeup put on perfectly. This was Mihara Kanami. She was on the girls' basketball team, and was Tomonori's close friend.

⁴The word they use is nenboukai. It's a year-end party for company workers, but the kanji literally mean “year-end forgetting party” or something like that. So the nuance here is that it is a party at the end of the year in which you forget about all the bad things that have happened over the last year, usually by getting completely and utterly drunk.

“Okay, I want in too!”

“What's going on? Whitewashing? Count me in!”

The boys running up to us from behind lifted their voices one after the other and began patting Orito on the back.

“Boooooooooooooooooooooooooooooob!!” When around five people had ganged up on him, Orito let out a strange shout.

“What the hell, Orito?” He had shouted right next to me, so my voice carried a hint of irritation.

“This was my idea. You guys know that, right?”

His breathing became erratic and he clung to my shoulders.

“Yeah...” Honestly, he was gross.

“So if any guys want to join, they have to bring a cute girl with them! Great idea, right?!”

What the hell was this guy saying? Tomonori and I were both completely at a loss. We even thought that maybe it would be a good idea to just have this party and invite everyone except Orito, but...

“Cute girl, huh...? Got it. I'll look for one.”

Anderson-kun smiled.

“You know, you don't have to humor him.”

Mihara shook her head, resigned.

“Well, wouldn't it be merrier if more people came? It's something that only happens once every year, after all.”

Ahh, Anderson-kun. You sure are a good person. Everyone was probably thinking that right now.

“I guess there's no helping it...” “Can we bring someone from a different school?” I heard a few people say things like that around us.

“Other than the girl being cute, there aren't any other requirements! Aikawa, you're gonna invite Sera-san, okay?!”

Orito fished out his cell phone while he said that. Everyone, you should really try not to bring your cell phone to gym class.

“Wait, you wanted a party for the students, right? Why is Sera coming?”

“Right now, I only have eyes for Sera!”

As gross as ever, Orito opened his mouth wide. Mihara looked at him with disgust, and then came over to me. “Who's Sera-san?” Ugh, that question was a bother to answer too...

“... Orito, you just want to have a mixer, don't you?”

“Yeah, exactly. I really want to do a mixer. I want to fall in love as much as an entire mountain of snow melting!⁵ I've already exhausted all the various options for a bachelor on Christmas!”

This bastard, getting all serious all of a sudden... and yeah, this whitewashing party for students was starting to sound awfully like a mixer...

“It's a rare opportunity, so the more the merrier.”

It seemed that Anderson-kun also approved of the idea of inviting Sera.

So I gave up, took the phone from Orito, and dialed home.

Well... I also knew exactly how this was going to go.

Riiinggg. Riiinggg. Riiinggg. Click.

“This is the Aikawa house.”

It was a prim and proper female voice.

If sounds came with smells, then this would've smelled like refreshing cool mint mixed with a bit of sweet cherry. I explained to Sera this idea for a whitewashing party that Orito and Anderson-kun had come up with, and told her that it would be great if she could come, when...

⁵A song title. Gerende ga Tokeru Hodo Koi Shitai.

“I don't want to.”

Yup. There it was, nice and clear.

“Come on, it'll be fun. And it only happens once a year.”

“I don't want to. Because it's disgusting.”

Sera responded coldly like that, and before I could say anything in return she had hung up the phone.

I looked at Orito, whose eyes in the middle of his glasses were brimming with hope, and I told it to him like it was.

“She said no. Because it's disgusting.”

When I think back to Orito's face that day... my God was that an ugly face he was making.

“Aikawa no longer has the right to participate!”

Well, it's not like I really wanted to go to this whitewashing party which was really a mixer, so I didn't say anything and just went back to running my marathon.





It looks like Aikawa and the others are having a mixer. It's like that, right?

Kanami explained it to me! It's like when you save a turtle and then the flounder and sea bream dance for you and give you a huge jack-in-the-box to bring home with you! Right?!

When is it gonna be?! When?! I can't wait!

Eh? During the day on Saturday? Wait wait wait! Isn't the vampire ninja meeting also that day?! Agh! Aikawaaa, which one do I go to?!

*A reference to Urashima Tarou, a Japanese folk tale in which a fisherman rescues a turtle. I have no idea if this was supposed to be something more than just a random reference.

Chapter 1 - Full Speed, Full Throttle! Starlight ! Cheers!!: Part 1

After I got back home, I set about the usual daily chore of making dinner.

Sera always made sure to keep our fridge stocked, so I found a mountain of ingredients in there. What kinds of food we had would determine what I made, but... I saw that the wieners, potatoes, and cabbage were all nearing their expiration dates. Okay, how `bout some French beef stew? I see some bacon in there too, after all.

I liked to take the juices from the meat, mix it with some rice, egg, and grated cheese, and make it into a risotto⁶.

I sighed at how smoothly I could do all this, probably since I was cooking every day now. I began to toss the prepared ingredients into the pot.

Now I just had to wait for things to boil, so I washed my hands and headed for the living room.

Waiting for me were two pretty girls.

The first was a black-haired girl with a ponytail, Sera. She was also the one who had picked up my phone call earlier. Like Tomonori and Saras, she was a vampire ninja. Saras was also her boss. Her body, which was so nice that I could never get tired of staring at it, was enveloped in a plain-white t-shirt with something written on it in English.

Her heavily-laden breasts were pushing up on her shirt, and the fabric on it might've been a bit thin since I could hazily make out her bra. It was like she was wearing a dressing gown. Her legs weren't under our kotatsu⁷, but rather she was sitting in the formal Japanese `seiza' style, with her knees tucked under her, while she watched television.

When her jade-colored eyes caught sight of me, she didn't say a single word, but just went back to watching the television.

I could hear laughs coming from the comedy variety show being shown on the television, but Sera wasn't laughing .

There was another girl, her legs stretched under the kotatsu as she faced the

⁶Am I the only person annoyed by the fact that you never ever put egg or Japanese rice into a risotto?

⁷A heated table with a blanket draped over it. Cozy.

television and sipped at her teacup.

She was silent and had no expression on her face. Her hair was silver, and her skin was almost transparently pale. She was a sublimely pretty girl.

Her small hands were enveloped by a pair of gauntlets.

A set of Western armor was wrapped around her small body.

Her name was Eucliwood Hellscythe, and she was the necromancer who had brought me back to life after I had died. She also didn't laugh at all while she watched the television.

Her gauntleted hand picked up a ballpoint pen and tapped twice on the table. When I looked down, I saw a single memo written there.

Dinner.

It was only one word, but inside my head...

Oniichan, Yuu's tummy is growling~~! Is dinner ready? Is it ready yet~~?

The little-sister-like Yuu in my head translated her words for me.

“I'm cooking some beef stew right now. Just wait a bit longer.”

Her huge, blue, crystal-like eyes gazed at me, and she gave me a petite nod.

Each and every one of her actions was just so damn cute... I couldn't help but smile.

“Disgusting...”

Sera began to glare at me as I grinned, looking at me like she would at some dirty rag.

If you had told me last year that I would be able to live under the same roof as a beauty like this, I might've cried with happiness. After experiencing it for real, not only did I lack a free enough moment to even try and be happy about it, but I found myself meeting with tragedy time and time again.

Honestly, how did these girls think of me in the first place?

“You know, we've been living together for half a year already. Shouldn't your affection points for me be a bit higher than this?”

I said that as I held my head in frustration. If this were a video game, it wouldn't take longer than a week to achieve better results.

“Oh? Have you not noticed?”

Her eyes blinked, causing her long eyelashes to move up and down.

“Noticed what?”

“When it comes to you, my affection points have already been maxed out.”

She spat that out, her expression so cold that you could probably build an ice-skating rink over it.

“It's maxed out... like this...?”

“Yes. These points won't ever get any higher. Ugh, stop asking me strange questions, if you'd please. You're disgusting.”

I really couldn't say anything anymore. That max was way too damn low.

“Hey, Sera.”

“What is it?”

“Could you call Haruna over here? This kotatsu is so amazingly comfy that I really don't want to get up .”

I really think that kotatsus are magical. It was a devilish little table that sapped your will to leave once you got under it.

“... Disgusting. Just looking at your face makes me nauseous, so could you please go off somewhere?”

Shall I go?

“Nah, I'll go and call her.”

Sera's gaze was far more threatening than the cold outside this kotatsu, so I myself began to go up the stairs to the second floor in search of Haruna.

Sera's room and my room were on the second floor. Haruna's room was also there. Well, Sera was using my parent's room, and Haruna was using my little brother's room, but my family was traveling so much and sending so little news home that I was just letting the girls use those rooms.

I found the room with a plate reading ``Genius!'' hanging from the door and knocked twice. ``I'm coming in!'' I announced before opening the door.

The heater was clearly doing its job, as the room was very warm. And in the middle of that room was one girl.

She was less than 145cm tall, and her breasts were nice and soft even though they weren't ripe at all.

She had huge, round cat-like eyes, and a perky, trademark ahoge stretched out from her head of shoulder-length chestnut hair. This spunky girl was wearing nothing but a t-shirt and polka-dotted panties and was sitting on her bed without a care in the world.

Her name was Haruna. She came to this world from the magical world Virie to exterminate monsters.

If she had the right item, she could chant a spell and transform into a masou shoujo, but after Yuu and then Chris snatched away her magical energy she couldn't transform anymore. What a sad masou shoujo she was...

I took a peek to see what she was doing...

``Ahaa~~. Waah~~. Mnnnrr. OK OK. Of course I'll go! Nyahaha~~..."

She was using my cell phone without my permission. I ignored the fact that she was making weird noises during the phone call and called out to her.

``Dinner's almost ready, so come downstairs."

``How many times do I gotta tell you to not come into my room like that?! Ayumu's seriously an idiot, ugh!"

Her ahoge bounced angrily back and forth, but I was used to this side of her so I just didn't really pay her too much heed. I tried to close the door, but before I could do that she tossed me my cell phone.

Hey hey, don't treat someone else's cell phone that coarsely. Ugh, this damn

masou shoujo...

I was a bit curious to know who she was talking to though, so I picked up the phone.

And she had been calling... Orito?

What could that damn living deity of Eros want with Haruna? This was a bit too awkward for me to just ask Haruna outright, though.

I went back to the living room and again tucked myself under that truly devilish kotatsu, and after a while a girl with an ahoge wearing short pants began coming down the stairs. At the same time, I heard a desperate beeping noise coming from the kitchen... the timer I had set for the beef stew was going off.

Unfortunately, I couldn't move.

The kotatsu was so damn comfy that I just couldn't move. But cut me some slack here. I really couldn't help it.

“Ayumu...” Sera sent me an imposing, cold look. But... this kotatsu was just so splendid... so I ignored Sera. Seeing that, she stood up, her ponytail swishing behind her, and headed for the kitchen.

Ahh, Sera sure was reliable...

“C-Cold! Brrrr!”

Haruna dashed down the cold hallway, slid into the living room, and plopped herself down right next to me. She began to pull the kotatsu towards her.

“Hey Haruna. Don't pull.”

“But it's cold...”

The word “cooperation” didn't seem to be part of this girl's vocabulary, and she continued to be selfish. Granted, I was pretty used to this behavior already, so I wouldn't really scold her too harshly for this.

Sera carried our dinner into the living room, and as we all enjoyed the delicious beef stew I had made from scratch, Haruna began to glare at me.

“These pretty ears of mine recently heard a rumor...”

Do you really have to specify that your ears are pretty?

“What's wrong, Haruna?”

Sera seemed slightly confused as to why Haruna was getting a bit worked up.

“Ayumu, there's going to be a party or something.”

“Who did you hear that from...?”

“That Origami guy or whatever.”

She meant Orito, didn't she? As always, she didn't remember the names of anybody she found uninteresting. That damned four-eyes. I see. That phone call back there was him inviting Haruna to the mixer, wasn't it?

“So, is Haruna going?”

“Of course! Don't underestimate how much masou shoujo love parties!”

Now that she mentioned it, Haruna did really seem to like events. She was always screwing up , but if I looked back on this year, she sure had done a lot. So that wasn't just Haruna, but was something that all masou shoujo liked to do...?

“Ahh, this is the event that Ayumu spoke about on the phone earlier?”

Sera sounded bored and sent me a glare.

I was also invited. Is Ayumu not going?

Ugh! Yuu was also invited? What if some creep started hitting on her?

“Of course, for someone like this party-master Haruna-chan , the number of new friends I'll be able to make will be endless!”

“Haruna, Orito's not just talking about a normal party... this is a mixer. It's a truly hellish place.”

Of course, I didn't want Haruna or Yuu to go to something like this, so I just came up with a random lie.

“Hueh? It's not a party? Ah, okay okay. It's that. I know about that.”

Haruna believed that there wasn't a single thing she didn't know. When she nodded like that, it was a sign that she was pretending to understand.

... I seriously didn't understand why people pretended to know things they really didn't.

“Mixers are places where guys and girls who don't know each other try to fish for a date.”

“Ayumu, I do believe that's a bit of an incorrect way to put it.”

Certainly, Sera was right, and I had exaggerated a bit. I guess it'd be more appropriate to say that it was a place where friends of friends were introduced to each other. I scratched my head and sighed deeply.

I was starting to regret having spoken out so strongly earlier .

“Ah, that! They're like marriage interviews! Hmm, marriage interviews...”

Haruna began to think about something as she chewed on a nice flaky piece of potato. Yuu showed her a memo.

It's fine. If we practice.

A mixer practice? I've never heard of something like that. I couldn't help but smile at the ridiculous suggestion, but...

“Yes! That's it! Okay then, from this minute on we're at a mixer! Begin!”

Haruna clapped her hands loudly. Huh? We're already starting? Well, fine then. I guess I'll play along.

“W-What kind of hobbies do you have?”

You're asking Sera the first question?! Not me?! Also, why the hell do you look so nervous?!

“My hobby is Hiken, Tsubamegaeshi.”

And there it is! The conversation is dead! Seriously, just lie or something, but come up with an answer that can lead to more conversation! What kind of

practice was this supposed to be?!

“Hmm, I'm not sure if it's a good idea to put cheese on curry...”

Haruna's ahoge bounced from side to side as she nodded, a bit of a nervous expression on her face.

“Stop right there! Haruna! You aren't doing it right there. Who exactly was asking you to talk about cheese curry?”

“What do you mean?! That's how the conversation feels, doesn't it?!”

“You can't go based on ‘feels’ alone! That wasn't a conversation at all!”

“Huh? What are you trying to say?”

“Come on Sera, let's give her a better example. Listen up, Haruna. The important thing is for you to learn about the other person and see how many things you have in common.”

“Well then, Ayumu... why exactly did you fail to tell me that our old chief had come back to life?”

Hnnnnnnnn... An indescribable aura began to emanate from Sera's entire body.

To fill you in, my class had changed its homeroom teacher recently. We went from a masou shoujo from Haruna's world to a vampire ninja from Sera's world. To be more specific, the chief of the vampire ninjas.

I hadn't really told Sera about that, but... ugh, she's suddenly bringing that up now?

“Well, umm... if I told you that would mean your mission would be over... how in the world did you know about that?”

Yes, the entire reason that Sera was in this house is because she wanted Yuu to turn her old chief into a zombie like me. Once Sera realized that her old chief had already revived, then this way of life I had been living would break down. Just thinking about that made me...

“Saras reported... that our chief was revived with Hellscythe-dono's power. But when I asked Hellscythe-dono earlier, she told me that she had done

nothing like that... what could be the meaning of this?"

This wasn't a marriage interview or a mixer or anything. This was just a damn interrogation.

The beef stew suddenly seemed like a bowl of cold gruel⁸. The living room was now an interrogation room, and Yuu, with her memo pad and ballpoint pen, was the clerk taking notes.

I had already had a few opportunities to speak with the chief of the vampire ninjas. I'd learned that he was actually the demon baron who started the coup d'état in Virie, and was also Dai-sensei's childhood friend. But I was told to keep all of that a secret from Saras.

I see, so he had told them that he was brought back to life. I stared Sera straight into her jade-colored eyes... and decided to tell the truth.

“Well, the truth is that he never died.”

“He was alive?! That's...”

Sera's eyes widened in shock. Well, he had been thought to have died for over a century, so I guess this was a natural reaction. And, like a criminal cornered by a famous detective, I continued to spill my guts out.

“Well, seems like he made a big mistake. Maybe he didn't want to reveal himself because he thought his presence could start a war in this world?”

Once the coup d'état had failed, the chief had hid himself so as to not alert the Queen of Virie to his presence.

In other words, if people knew that he was alive, the Queen of Virie would come to kill him. After all, he might be planning another coup even now with the help of Dai-sensei.

If I were her, if I knew someone like that was alive in this world, I would run out of the palace and come here to kill him right away.

But now, we also had to deal with Chris, the strongest masou shoujo, who also took part in the coup. It seemed she had shown herself in order to rally all the vampire ninjas together. Ugh, what a mess.

⁸He uses “gyudon,” which is a beef rice bowl. I localized this a bit though since it's not really clear that a beef rice bowl is kind of considered to be bleh fast food in Japan.

“In other words... he pretended to be dead to protect this world. Is that what you're saying?”

“I think so. But you'll really have to ask him yourself to be sure of that.”

Why didn't you tell me any of this before? Sera's eyes seemed to be entreating me. It's really... because I had gotten too comfortable with how life was going.

Haruna was nodding next to me, and then in the middle of the conversation suddenly licked her plate clean and thrust her empty plate out at Sera.

“Seconds! Also, I know what to do now! Just sit back and watch!”

Yeah yeah...

Haruna sat on her knees and faced her large, round eyes at Sera.

“Please... give me your daughter's hand in marriage!”

My God, that was way too direct! I could feel snot just shooting right from my nose!

Sera continued to ladle beef stew out onto the plate...

“What if I don't want to?”

Gyah! I could feel a magnitude eight fissure cracking through my psyche from that. Maybe Sera was in a bad mood now from our conversation... but that one attack should've weighed pretty heavily on Haruna as well.

Tap tap. Yuu tapped the table twice.

It's too soon for that. = “Wait ‘til after the mixer and a bunch of other twists and turns before asking that~~!”

“Hueh? What am I supposed to do then? This is so annoying.”

“You have to try to find topics that everyone can join in on, and look for common interests and stuff.”

“Ohh! You should've said that earlier!”

Geez, this girl. I'm glad we had this practice. Better to do this here than at the

mixer itself, where she'd end up getting everyone around her completely confused.

“If you ask me, I don't think there'll ever be a pilot that's better than Rock Iwasaki!”

Who the hell was that?!⁹

His barrel roll corkscrews were works of art.

“Yes, he sure put on a brilliant air show. He could move those airplanes through the air however he wanted, just like they were his own hands and feet. Just thinking about it makes me shiver.”

... They're really getting into this. And being the only person who couldn't get into this conversation, I...

“A-Ahh. Rock Iwasaki was pretty amazing. Yeah.”

I ate my beef stew while pretending to know what I was talking about.

... I guess I kinda see now why people pretended to know things they didn't.

⁹Just for your reference, Rock Iwasaki is an airshow pilot who died in 2005.

Chapter 1: Part 2

Now then, what should we do? No, I'm not talking about the mixer.

After I had finished eating the beef stew, I returned to my room and lay on my bed.

Haruna was still probably down there, practicing for the mixer with Yuu and Sera. You could say that I had slipped out of there because I couldn't really join the conversations they were having.

As I played a CD from a rock band I was really into lately, I stared up at the ceiling and started thinking about a bunch of things.

That vampire ninja meeting was weighting on my mind.

I had been allowed to go to the meeting, but let's say for a moment that things went swimmingly and I figured out where Chris was right now.

Then what should I do?

Chris was the *strongest* masoushoujo.

Meanwhile, I was just a *disgusting* masoushoujo.

She would probably kill me the minute she saw me. Well, I was already dead, so that might've not been the best way to put it... but suffice to say that I would probably not come out unscathed from the encounter.

In other words, before I started thinking about where Chris was, I had to find a way to beat her.

People who could beat Chris... well, there was only one person who came to mind. I took out my cell phone and dialed the most knowledgeable person I knew regarding masoushoujo. It was the number for the place Haruna had attended school when she was back in Virie: Matelis Magical Academy.

“Thank you for your call. This is Matelis Magical Academy, Els speaking.”

I heard a woman's energetic, pretty voice from the other side of the line. However, she was just an employee at the academy, not the person I was looking for.

“Ah, it's been a while. My name is Aikawa Ayumu, and umm... is Ariel-sensei there?”

“Ariel? Umm, yes. Please wait for a moment.”

I was put on hold, and Für Elise began to play over the phone. I waited nervously for around five minutes, and then...

“My myyy~~. Ayumu-san, how are you~~?”

A calm, carefree voice came to me from the other side of the line. This was Dai-sensei. She was Haruna's homeroom teacher, and was the most monstrously strong person I knew.

If I knew anyone who stood a chance against Chris, it was Dai-sensei.

“Nice to talk to you again too. I had a bit of a question for you, so do you have some time?”

I heard a bit of cute laughter.

“Yes, I'm do have time~~. If I didn't, I wouldn't have answered the phone call~~.”

“Well, it's actually about Chris...”

“... Ahh, there's really nothing to worry about theeere~~. My dear dear friend is getting together a bunch of people and they'll deal with it~~. I told you that already, nooo~~?”

“Haha, that's good, but well... hypothetically, if you had to fight her one-on-one, what would you do?”

I tried to make it sound like I was asking purely out of curiosity and even chuckled a bit, but...

“... Ayumu-san, I should warn you.”

It seemed she had me figured out through and through.

Her words echoed loudly through my head.

“You must not, *must not*, go after Chris. Okaaay~~?”

“You know she stole Haruna's magical energy, right?”

“Yes, I've heard~~.”

“I have to make her pay for that.”

“But I don't even know if I could beat her, so does Ayumu-san really think he stands a chance~~?”

Dai-sensei chuckled. She made it sound like I was some little kid, asking for something silly and impossible.

“I already completely understand that, but I'm still asking. Maybe she has a weak point or something...”

“Weak point, hmm~~? It'd be nice if there was one...”

“How did the Queen of Virie beat her?”

“Well, just normall-... ah.”

I don't think I've ever heard Dai-sensei choke on her words like that.

“What's wrong?”

“I just remembered somethinggg... Chris has only ever lost to two people~~. One was the Queen. And the otherrr...”

Chris had challenged the Queen of Virie alongside Dai-sensei and the demon baron, but their plan had backfired.

After that, she was cursed to spend her days as an old man, and ended up being employed as my homeroom teacher.

To beat someone like that... well, I thought that you'd have to be a masou shoujo, but...

“was someone called the `King of the Night.’”

I gulped at Dai-sensei's words.

“King of the Night...”

I knew that name. That was a man who had already left this plane of

existence by Yuu's hand.

“I had calculated it again and again, and I didn't see any way he could beat Chris-senpai with his power... but he wonnn~~. Chris was grumbling about it while she was drinking, so there's no mistaking it.”

I see. I really didn't see how the King of the Night could have enough strength to be Chris. That's how frighteningly strong Chris was.

“In other words, he knew something that made up for the difference in power. He knew a weak spot.”

There was also a huge difference in power between me and the King of the Night, but I managed to come out of that encounter the victor by hitting his weak spot. The King of the Night might've done the same thing with Chris.

“That is certainly... very possible~~.”

I could feel a glimmer of hope. However, the King of the Night was no longer here... but wait.

“I wonder if Kyouko knows what Chris's weak point is...”

“... Kyouko? Ah, thaaat girl~~. I wonder~~...”

Kyouko had worked together with the King of the Night.

I didn't know how long their partnership had been going on for, but I'm sure they'd had at least a few opportunities to trade grandiose stories of heroism.

“It'd be nice if I could briefly ask her about it. Where is she right now anyways?”

“She's locked away here at the school right nooow~~.”

I see... so she was in prison...

“No no! Wait! What do you mean she's locked away at school?! Isn't that really dangerous?!”

“Wellll, if you need to keep an eye on a masoushoujooo... then shouldn't you put them somewhere with a lot of other masou shoujo~~? There aren't many beings that can beat a masoushoujo without a masourenki... just me and the

Megalo probably~~."

``Wouldn't Chris also be able to?"

``Yes. That's whyyy she had her power stripped away and was chased out of this world~~."

``So you really imprisoned her..."

``Why do you sound sooo surprised~~? She murdered a lot of people in Ayumu-san's world, did she nooot~~? What else did you expect us to dooo~~?"

``I mean, it was a big deal in my world... but I wouldn't have thought it would matter to people in Virie."

Virie, the world where Haruna and Dai-sensei had come from, didn't really think much of the humans from our world. That's why this was surprising.

``Oh? Hmm... Ayumu-san, do you know whyyyy the masoushoujo always wipe everyone's memories after a battle~~?"

``Okay, why do you?"

``Hmph, so Haruna didn't explain it to you~~...? Masou shoujo... their existence has to be kept a secret to other worlds. I mean, if masoushoujo meet resistance when they try to invade another worlds, like with the Megalo, wouldn't it be a big bother for us~~?"

``Yeah, I guess it would be."

``Right now, the Underworld is producing all these Megalo, right~~? We think that they stole magical technology from Virie to be able to make those. In order to not make the same mistake, we always wipe people's memories after a battle, and it's striiictly forbidden to draw too much attention to yourself~~."

``So in the end, the crime wasn't the murders themselves..."

``Yes, I don't think soo~~. She drew far too much attention. That hurts our entire world, so we punish her. I think that's the reasoning behind ittt~~."

``Can I... talk with Kyouko?"

“Hmm, let me talk with her. I'll call you riight back. Is that okayy~~?”

“Yes, that's fine. Thanks.”

I heard the *click* of Dai-sensei hanging up, and I began to surrender my body to drowsiness.

If we could just figure out Chris's weak point... the very thought made my heart jump with excitement. I could see it now. The little spark of light within the darkness.

Ah? My phone was vibrating. Who was calling me now?

It was... a very special phone number, the Virie number I had just called a minute ago.

“Hello?”

“Ahh, is this Ayumu-sann~~?”

Hm? It was Dai-sensei. But we had ended our call just a few moments ago. What did she want?

“I talked with the girll~~”

“Damn, that was fast! So, did you figure out what Chris's weak point is?”

“Welll, the girl has one condition~~.”

Kyouko was the person behind my murder, so I had no idea what troublesome condition she might come up with. My eyebrows twitched in anticipation.

-

“I'll talk if it's at a party with you.”

-

Dai-sensei sure did a really believable Kyouko impression.

“Huh? Eh? Pardon me?” I responded with a bit of disappointment on my face. How anticlimactic.

“Hmm, seems like she's willing to talk with you if it's in your world,at a place

with lots of people~~."

``Well, recently we've been planning a party of sorts..."

Across the line, I heard Dai-sensei's voice get one level higher.

``A party! You're having a party?!"

It wasn't her usual lazy way of speaking. Rather, this clear, energetic tone reminded me more of Haruna.

``Yeah. One of my classmates wants to have a mixer..."

I suddenly remembered how Haruna had said that masou shoujo really like parties.

``I'm going! Ugh! Why didn't you invite me before~~?"

She asked me almost furiously, as if she couldn't believe me.

``Well, that's fine and all... but wouldn't it be dangerous for Kyouko to come?"

``That'll be fine~~. I'll be there too, and we'll seal her magical powers~~."

Dai-sensei will be there? Well, then if Kyouko tries anything I'm sure she'll be stopped right away.

But...

``I'm still... kinda reluctant to let a murderer loose here in our world... also, is it really that easy to release her from prison? I really don't want to impose on you, so maybe this time it's a better idea if we don't—"

``You... can't do this...? For mee~~..."

Ugh! She was so cute! How the hell did she get her voice to sound like that?!

``Okay, I understand."

Wah?! Why the hell did I just agree?!

This was... the power of the masou shoujo, wasn't it?

``That's good~~. To tell you the truth, I've already posted her bail for next

Saturday~~."

... Well now, Dai-sensei. If I didn't tell you about this party, you were planning on just throwing your own, weren't you? Geez, exactly how much power did Dai-sensei have over there in Virie?

Man... masou shoujo just did whatever the hell they wanted, didn't they...? It was really hard to deal with.

But... they were cute so I guess it's fine.

Chapter 1: Part 3

It was after school on the next day. Our classroom was nice and toasty from the heater we had installed, and I was right in front of a spiky-haired, four-eyed guy who had his legs crossed (even though they weren't that long) and a smile of pure triumph on his face... with my head bowed to the ground.

“Please, go ahead and say that one more time. Go on.”

His voice was really, really, really, really, really, *really* irritating. But I tolerated it and spoke from my prostrate position.

“Please, let me go to the mixer.”

“Hmm? I couldn't hear you. Let who go? To what?”

“Let this humble person go.”

“Lowly.”

“Let this lowly, humble person go to the mixer that Orito-sensei is holding-”

“Stylish.”

“Please let this lowly, unsightly person go to the end-of-year mixer that the super-stylish Orito-sensei is holding...”

I ground my teeth. I had no idea anything this humiliating could exist in this world.

“So, what about Sera-san then?”

“No, Sera's not coming... but I'm bringing some cute girls with me.”

“Oh hoh. What kind of cute girls?”

“Haha... well, there's a loli with big breasts and a more gentle twin-tails.”

“Then it's fine!”

“By the way, when and where are you holding this party? Has it been decided yet?”

“People have been telling me to not make it overlap with Christmas or Winter Break... but I still haven't decided.”

“If possible, could we do it next Saturday afternoon? The two I'm bringing are only free then.”

“Okay. I'll let everyone know then... you're sure they're super cute, right?”

“They're suuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuper cute.”

“That's... what I wanted to hear.”

For some reason, at that moment, Orito was sparkling so much I could've sworn he was actually cool.

I returned to my seat, watching Orito as he went away with a loud, satisfied laugh.

Well, there was no helping it. I had to make sure to get the info I needed from Kyouko, and also to repay Dai-sensei for all the times she'd helped me out. Also, I had to make sure that no weirdo started hitting on Yuu!

Dammit. Someday I'd make him beg me for something too. I stood up as I told that to myself.

I dusted off my knees and watched a black-haired beauty come in and take Orito's place in front of me.

She had a long, slender body. When I dropped my gaze to look at her long legs wrapped in black stockings, I got a knee right to my nose.

“Don't look at me with those annoying eyes... my piece-of-garbage darling.”

I was a zombie, so I didn't feel any pain, but I still held my broken nose with one hand. This woman was merciless.

“Well, sorry. So... what did you want?”

“It's about the meeting.”

She flipped back the long black hair that cascaded down her shoulders and put both hands on her slender hips.

“Ahh, what about it?”

“I've come to tell you that we've decided on a time. The meeting will start at 1pm next Saturday.”

..... Crap.

“Seriously?”

“Hm? What's wrong, my darling?”

“Well... uhh...”

I weighed my options in my head. If I had to choose between knowing about Chris's weak point (info I could probably get) or knowing about Chris's whereabouts (which might be unreliable info), which should I go with?

Well, the answer to that was...

“It's nothing. I'm looking forward to it.”

I picked both.

It might not have been because I cared about the information... perhaps I was just another curious high schooler who wanted to go check out both the vampire ninja meeting and the mixer.

Chapter 1: Part 4

And well, after this and that, 1pm on Saturday rolled around.

Sera was wearing a dazzling white dress underneath a down coat, almost as if she had been nominated for an Academy Award or something. I followed her as we went towards Roppongi.¹⁰

The weather was cloudy. The weather was rarely sunny these days, and I couldn't be happier.

Zombies were vulnerable to sunlight. Enjoy that little piece of trivia.

“Ayumu, please try to not look too disgusting today. I would be greatly displeased if the others thought that I was as strange as you. I'll stick a needle through your lips, okay?”

She was going to sew my mouth shut?! As I listened to the ponytailed beauty walking next to me tell me that, I walked forwards stiffly, almost as if I was going to battle.

Also, this was a meeting, right? Judging from Sera's outfit, it seemed more like a party or something...

Well, this wasn't good... I was going to a mixer after this, so I was just wearing a jacket I liked and some ripped jeans. I went for a casual outfit, but a tuxedo would've been a far better match for Sera's.

We weren't far from our destination. Once we got there, we found Seras waiting in an elegant long coat.

“Ohh, my darling. You've come.”

Saras opened her arms and greeted me. Hmm. Can I hug her? No no, definitely not! This was a trap! Instead, I just raised one hand and gave her a “Yo” in greeting.

Sera stopped walking and crossed her arms.

“Saras... what is the meaning of that odd greeting?”

¹⁰One of the more expensive districts in Tokyo.

It seemed that Sera wasn't really pleased with what Saras had called me. Saras was Sera's superior, but they always talked as if they were equals. They'd often butt heads, but I'd say they were friends.

“I'm just expressing my love. Nothing more.”

Sera didn't come out and say it, but I'm sure she thought that was disgusting.

“Also, Seraphim. As always, you've come dressed like a harlot.”

Harlot, huh... I guess that's one way to look at it. After all, that pure white dress of hers had such a daring V-cut that I couldn't look at anything other than her cleavage.

“You're the last person I want to hear that from.”

Sera didn't sound pleased. If I just left them like this, I could see a ninja battle where someone said “You're really something, aren't you?!” after every attack breaking out¹¹, so I shoved myself into the conversation.

“By the way, what's Saras wearing to this meeting?”

“My dear low-life darling. Are you that interested? How greedy of you.”

She opened her coat, almost as if she was waiting for me to ask that. Her black dress was the exact opposite of Sera's, and though it suited her just as well. Maybe she was also a bit worried about her smaller breast size, as her dress was a bit less daring.

“So, what's in the bag?”

“My stage costume.”

Stage costume? Saras opened the big bag. Inside it was... a costume I'd expect to see a punk rock band wearing. There was a pair of jean shorts and some black tights. Even if I ignored the bottom part of her outfit, there wasn't much fabric on the top half at all, was there?

... Wait... exactly what kind of meeting was I going to...?

¹¹A Naruto reference.

Chapter 1: Part 5

We left Roppongi, walking along the main street in the Azabu direction for around ten minutes... and arrived at a karaoke box.

“Wha—Sera... this is a... meeting, right?”

“Yes. Vampire ninja meetings generally take place in locations like this.”

Wow, that was pretty casual. Well, I already knew that they were a pretty casual group.

I see... they were going to sing, so Saras had brought a stage outfit like that.

A large group of people dressed similarly to Sera were gathered in the reception area. Everyone was wearing an outfit that looked better suited for a fancy hotel or something. I had to go to a mixer after this, so I was wearing something rather rough... well, it can't really be helped.

I counted that there were around sixty people there. There were people of all kinds too, from people who looked like elementary schoolers to jolly old Santa lookalikes.

If they all shared one common trait, it was that there wasn't a single ugly person amongst them. I guess vampires were all pretty goodlooking, weren't they? Geez, if only the same could be true for zombies... we were undead too, you know...

We went up the stairs in groups, and were shown into a room that almost looked like a party hall.

I've never really been to karaoke with much more than four people, so I didn't even know that they had these huge party rooms available...

Wait, but if there were this many people how were all of them going to sing? Why in the world did the karaoke people think it was a good idea to make a huge room like this?

“Well then, I have some people I need to say hello to... so I'll leave you for now. Though, let me just warn you in advance. If you decide to sing, I might find myself disgusted listening to you that I just chop you up like a cabbage. I apologize in advance.”

“Okay, I'll just stay quiet in a corner then. I'd rather not be made into a crunchy vegetable, after all.”

Everyone here seemed to know each other, and the people around me began to chitchat.

I was an outsider, though, and I wasn't outgoing enough to try speaking to a stranger, so I just stood quietly in the corner. Well, nah, this was a good opportunity, and I really did want to mingle with some of these people.

But... the only people standing near me were two middle-aged salaryman-looking guys.

“Well, you put in tube flour, fried tofu and some sliced vegetables...”

“Sounds delicious. Much better than just eggs.”

How exactly was I supposed to butt into a conversation about oden?!¹² That wasn't possible! Also, I was at that age where eggs were the most delicious thing ever! I could eat an entire damn meal of just eggs and daikon! And while this agonizing monologue was still running through my head...

“Yoo, Aikawa! You came!”

Tomonori came over, waving her hands energetically. Her body was wrapped in a red dress.

Thank God. If not for her, I was going to become embroiled in a heated oden discussion...

Tomonori always came off as boyish, but when she wore a dress like that, with enough open at the top to really highlight her breasts, and when she put a small flower like that in her hair, you really had no choice but to say that she was a cute girl.

“I guess clothes make the man.”

“What man?! I'm not a man!”¹³

¹²Basically a kind of Japanese hot pot.

¹³Ok I took quite a few liberties here. The real phrase that Ayumu uses is “mago ni mo ishou” which means “even a horse can be dressed up.” Mago is also the word for “grandchild,” which confuses Tomonori and prompts her to reply “Who's grandchild?! When did I mention that I was doing anything in my grandfather's name?!” The latter part of her comment is a reference to the Kindaichi Case Files manga. Anyways, this is all utterly impossible to translate into English, so I localized it a bit, but here's the footnote for the people who really care about the

“No, Tomonori, that's not what I was getting at...”

“D-Don't call me Tomonori! Here it's Mael Strom all the way!”

“No matter where we are, in my heart you'll never be the vampire ninja Mael Strom, just my friend Tomonori.”

“... Aikawa. Alright.”

“Why are you blushing?”

Just as Tomonori began to quiet down, a guy in a tuxedo and bowtie took the microphone and began to speak in a foppish voice.

“Alright, settle down~~. Has everyone got their drinks?”

Ah, we were going to do a toast? ... Eh? This was supposed to be something like a council meeting, right? This wasn't an end-of-the-year party, right? I stood there in the corner fidgeting nervously, but yeah, there was very little doubt in my mind at this point. This was an end-of-the-year party.

For now, I just kept my mouth shut next to Tomonori as I picked up a glass of oolong tea that was close by.

“Well then, let's have our chief lead us in this toast!”

A round of applause echoed through the room, and the microphone was passed to the demon baron.

His hair was unkempt, his beard slovenly, and his expression was lazy. At least he was wearing a tuxedo instead of his usual white lab coat.

He looked kinda irritated... I don't think he was necessarily irritated about having to lead the toast, but rather just because his face usually looked like that. Geez, he really looked tired.

It seemed that the demon baron had been cursed by the Queen of Virie to always be on the brink of death, so his tired expression might have been because he honestly was pretty tired.

“Okay, here we go...”

original.

I had no idea why, but it seemed like Tomonori was getting worked up about something.

The demon baron really didn't seem like he had prepared a toast, so he just stood there going ``uhh..." for a few seconds...

``Uhh, well, when you say `toast,' it makes me think of the phrase `we're toast,' which is bad. So instead of the usual `cheers,' let's say `victory'! Okay... cheers!"¹⁴

W-W-What the hell did he want us to do? After the demon baron imitated a certain politician in his toast speech, I heard the sounds of other people going ``Cheers!" beginning to spread through the room.

The sound of glass on glass reverberated all around us, and Tomonori swished her dress.

``Let's go, Aikawa! It's a cheers war!"

What the hell was that? Before I could think about it, though, four burly-looking guys came right at me yelling ``Cheeeeeeeeeerrrrss~~!!!!"

Completely overwhelmed by their attacks, I suddenly just turned tail and ran.

When I had escaped to a corner of the room, I suddenly ran into the demon baron.

``Ahh, Aikawa Ayumu-kun. You've come at a good time."

``What exactly are you doing in this corner?" ``My doctor ordered me to stop doing toasts. When vampire ninjas do toasts, it's more like a battle. I have to avoid it somehow."

Seriously? Well, certainly, when the vampire ninjas around me clanged their glasses together so aggressively, it did seem like they were fighting each other. Their yells of ``Cheers!" really were like battle cries.

``Aikawa~! Cheers!!"

She looked like she was having a lot of fun. Tomonori had a smile on her face as she thrust her cola-filled glass at me.

¹⁴In Japanese, cheers is ``kanpai," which also is the same pronunciation as the word for ``complete defeat." This remark mimics ones made in the past by Naoto Kan, one of the more recent Prime Ministers of Japan.



It was at times like these when I really marveled at how full of energy Tomonori was.

“Well then, Aikawa Ayumu-kun.”

“Hmm?”

“Protect me.”

... Well, I guess if their long-lost chief suddenly began to spit out blood and then collapsed, everyone would be worried...

A bunch of guys charged at us from behind Tomonori, almost like excited bulls in a bullfight.

... Their target was... the demon baron's glass?!

Well, of course, everyone would want to clink glasses with their mighty, long-lost chief who was finally resurrected. I could feel that desire thick in the air.

“Let's gooooooooo~~! Cheeeers!!!”

Tomonori crashed her glass of cola against the glass of oolong tea I had.

Gah! What was this power?!

I was sent flying like a bowling pin. As I stumbled backwards, Tomonori thrust her glass at the demon baron.

The demon baron looked a bit panicked.

... As if I'd let that happen. I quickly inserted myself between them and met Tomonori's glass with my own.

Clang! I used just enough power so that our glasses wouldn't shatter. The cola in Tomonori's glass swished around, almost spilling.

“Wha-?! You repelled my glass?! My toast power is eighteen-thousand! That's pretty amazing, Aikawa!”

What the hell is ‘toast power’?

``Uooooooooh!! Cheers!"

Beer mugs came rushing at us from behind Tomonori. I met those glasses coming from the left with my own, driving them away.

``Cheers!"

``Whaaaaaaaaat?!?! Here I come!"

Cling. Clang. Cling.

Beer mugs came at me one after another. Of course, I soon couldn't handle all of them with just one glass.

I glanced at the demon baron, and saw that he was desperately downing his oolong tea. I see. If there wasn't anything left in his glass, then it would be pointless for other people to try and cling it.

``Oooo... fuu fuu... cool down..."

Why was he drinking hot oolong tea?! This idiot!! He didn't look like he could take it either!

Dammit! That's going to take a hell of a long time to drink dry!

``Full speed, full throttle! Starlight~! Cheers!!"

Bam. What looked like a twintailed nine-year-old clanged glasses with me, and my back crashed into the wall from the force.

Beer mugs continued to come at me from all directions.

This was hopeless. I had tried my best. The demon baron still had more than half his oolong tea left.

I couldn't go on any longer.

Just come at me! Hit me anywhere you want! Or meh, honestly, I just don't care anymore... the minute I thought that, a pretty black-haired girl appeared in front of me.

``Saras..."

“My darling. You've done well. Let me take over from here. No matter how many oppose me, I won't let anybody near our chief.”

I see. The chief had told Saras about the whole spitting blood thing?

“I-Its Sarasvati...”

Saras was emitting an aura that stopped everyone in their tracks. Soon, however, a guy built like the muscular performer Brutus¹⁵ stood in front of her. He had a huge beer mug in his hand.

“Sarasvati, rumored to have a toast power of over five million... I could not ask for a more worthy opponent!”

The minute his glass touched Saras's, the vampire ninja was sent flying across the room. He slid cleanly from one edge of the floor to the other.

Clang. “Gyaaaah?!”

Clang. “Hngyaaaah!!”

She was an iron wall. Every single person who clanged glasses with Saras went sliding across the room, almost as if they had mistaken the floor for a skating rink.

“Uwaaaaaaaaaahh!” Even Tomonori, who was boasting about her toast power of eighteen-thousand earlier, was easily sent flying. But another vampire ninja seemed to have spied his chance and appeared suddenly from the side, thrusting his cup of green tea forwards.

Even Saras seemed to be surprised by that. She clicked her tongue.

But... she couldn't make it in time.

The glass of green tea drew close to the demon baron...

“Hiken, Tsubamegaeshi!”

A white dress fluttered in the wind, like many blooming lilies. Sera appeared, holding a cup of oolong tea in each hand and defending against the other vampire ninja's toast. Their cups clanged, and the other vampire ninja flew high in the air and smacked right into the ceiling.

¹⁵Japanese celebrity.

``Not bad at all."

``You either."

Saras gave Sera a bold smile, and got another bold smile in return.

Clang. Their two cups hit each other. It was like watching two warriors lock swords. But then, more vampire ninjas came at them.

``Seraphim-"

``Yes! No need to explain!"

Sera was there in her white dress, and Saras was there in her black one.

Those two were... quite a pretty and soothing sight to behold.¹⁶

As everyone gazed in awe at Saras and Sera's iron defense, one girl raised her hand.

``You know, something annoys me about this."

That girl seemed around my age, and her light-brown hair was done up in a fluffy perm. What kind of ninja looked like that?

But taking a closer look, I saw a group of three girly-looking girls gathered together and frowning. All of them had the same hairstyle and makeup on and, as with all vampire ninjas, were pretty cute.

``This is a party to celebrate the chief coming back, right? So why can't we clink our glasses with his? I'm getting pretty pissed about this..."

``Yeah, seriously. Who do you think you are? Just some squad leader in the conservative faction."

``And that ponytailed one over there, wasn't she the one who deserted her mission? How nice of *you* to show up."

Kyahaha... the three of them let out ridiculing laughs.

Because Sera had once defied an idiotic order to kill Yuu, she had fallen out with the vampire ninjas. She had also saved the vampire ninjas from a bomb,

¹⁶He says that they are ``pretty" and ``cure," which is a clear reference to the Precure series.

though, so I thought that all had been forgiven.

Did she really have to carry out the mission to kill Chris before everything would go back to normal?

“Hey hey, don't argue! This isn't the place for that...”

Tomonori seemed nervous as she looked back and forth between the girls and Saras.

Saras just stood still as the three girls gave her their awfully annoying smiles, but I could see that her right hand was shaking.

Saras... was holding a lot back.

“This is something I asked Sarasvati to do, so she's not at fault.”

The demon baron also chimed in on Saras's behalf, but the three girls wouldn't stop.

“Just because you're a bit cute, don't get so full of yourself—”

They just went on and on and on, when something in Saras finally erupted.

“Shut up! You damn small fry... it's like listening to nails on a chalkboard!”

In response to Saras's roar, one of the permed girls frowned and walked up to Saras with her glass of cola in one hand.

And then... she splashed her drink right into Saras's face.

The black dress that Saras had gone through all that trouble to put on became soaked with cola. Seeing that, the three girls giggled happily.

“Seems like you have a death wish.”

Her voice sounded like it had risen up from the very core of her heart. Saras's fists trembled as she launched a punch down at the permed girl's annoying yet cute face.

But I caught her fist.

“Darling...”

“You can't attack them. Isn't that why you told me you were holding this meeting in the first place? You planned everything, right? You wanted to join everyone together again, didn't you?”

“But...”

“You're really too emotional sometimes.”

I had interrupted, but then the girl with the fluffy perm suddenly punched me right in the cheek.

“This has nothing to do with you. Keep out of it!”

That seemed to finally be the last straw for Saras. Something in her came loose.

“You... just stop it right now! Is the reform faction really that great?!”

It was the signal for battle.

“Saras, calm down! Seriously, that didn't hurt me at all!”

A fight broke out between the reform and conservative factions, even though Saras had worked so hard to get everyone in the same room together.

“Stop! Stoop!”

Tomonori raised her voice, but nobody seemed to be listening.

“Calm down! Ugh! How did it get like this?!”

I wedged myself in between Saras and the other girl, holding them apart. Saras was clearly seething with anger, but the permed girl just had a mocking smile on her face.

“Just because you can't beat me on the net rankings doesn't mean you have to be so upset. How petty...”

Ah, this girl was also a net idol. Now that I recall, Orito had told me that Saras was one of the top idols. She went by “Lovely Kirara” online, a name that really didn't suit such a beautiful girl.

“Well aren't you cocky?! Who the hell do you think you are?!”

It seemed like Saras had stepped on a sore point.

“I didn't realize before now that your singing, performance skills, and looks were so mediocre because you had a personality problem.”

This time, it was Saras's turn to smile mockingly.

This wasn't going to stop, was it...? Did vampire ninjas always fight over such stupid things? While all this was happening though, the demon baron finished off his hot oolong tea and took the microphone.

“This is an order. Stop.”

That one sentence seemed to have come straight from the heavens. His menacing voice made even me cower in fear.

The entire room fell into stark silence.

As expected from the chief. He could get everyone's attention with a single word. He was usually a tired-looking guy with disheveled hair and messy beard, but suddenly I felt like I could rely on this person.

“I'm sorry!”

Everyone's eyes widened at the demon baron's next words. We had thought he was angry at us, so to hear him apologize was a bit shocking. At least, I was definitely surprised.

“I've known all this time that you've all been quarreling. I really want to apologize for not stepping in while all that was happening. But there's no reason to fight anymore, right?”

The demon baron had pretended to die and hid himself from the world. Because of that, the vampire ninjas split into two factions and began to fight with each other. He knew about all of that. He knew about all of that, but he couldn't show himself to stop it.

I'm sure the demon baron was in anguish over all of that. Looking into his eyes was enough to convince me of that.

He let out a single sigh and stroked his unkempt beard. The demon baron had already gone back to his usual weary expression.

“I can't stand to watch you all fight anymore. Let's just consider it all water under the bridge, okay? Let's get along like the old days.”

Saras and the three girls glared at each other unhappily. And then... they walked away from each other to opposite corners of the room.

Geez. At least consider the mood and give him a bit of applause, dammit.

Chapter 1: Part 6

The whirlwind that was the toast war had finally ended, and I let out a sigh. I had somehow survived, and now I looked around me nervously.

Tomonori had a bottle of dressing in one hand and was hunting for food.

Sera was checking the list of new songs in the karaoke machine by herself.

Saras was headed for a large throng of vampire ninjas. I hesitated, considering following her, but soon realized that I had already let the appropriate timing for that slip away.

Also, where was the demon baron? Both Saras and Tomonori seemed to be in the thick of things, but Sera was alone, so I decided to head for her.

“Oh, if it isn't Ayumu. You're as disgusting as always.”

Sera looked just a bit lonely.

There were two middle-aged looking men close by, but...

“There's a really good new oden restaurant that opened in Tokyo Tower, you know.”

“Ah, that famous one that uses the different kind of dashi...”¹⁷

“They have this deep fried tofu, you see... and it's soooooo good...”

They were still going on and on about oden, so it was probably hard for Sera to join in on the conversation. Actually, this was a good opportunity. I sat myself down next to Sera, happy to have someone to talk to. I leaned forwards a bit, wanting to check the new song list with Sera.

“Ayumu.”

“What is it?”

“This is sexual harassment.”

“What is where is what...?”

¹⁷Japanese fish broth, basically. A base for a large number of Japanese recipes.

She was being so unfair that I couldn't even talk straight anymore.

“Could you not distance yourself a bit from me? You're disgusting.”

Was it seriously sexual harassment to just be near her? Ugh. I heeded her wishes and leaned away from her.

“Where did the chief go?”

“Chief? He's probably in the bathroom.”

“I see...”

I sat back and waited for the chief, while a vampire ninja next to Sera who I had never seen before sang a song.

But the chief never showed up.

I waited for five minutes... this was starting to get uncomfortable. Sera didn't seem to want to keep me company at all, so staying here was getting harder and harder. It was tough being the away team... if only Tomonori would come over, I might be able to find an oasis in this psychological desert... but it was hopeless. She was too far away.

I see. All the conservative faction vampire ninjas were probably over here, and all the reform faction vampire ninjas were probably over there.

I mustered up my courage and headed for Saras, who was in the most crowded part of the room.

Saras had gotten cola splashed on her earlier, so she had changed into the punk rock outfit she had brought in her bag. Her boots and hot pants were gleaming, and only one strip of cloth covered her softly bulging chest. She probably wasn't even wearing a bra. I mean, after all, her waist was so slender and nice-looking that she could get away with showing her belly button.

As expected from the net idol, Lovely Kirara-tan.

I began to call out to her, but before I could...

“Oh, hey Saras-chan. Have you eaten yet?”

An old man with quite a stunning beard appeared. Saras let out a sigh.

“Geez... I already ate yesterday, you old fool.”

Someone feed this woman three meals a day, dammit! Also, why was she using a critical tone like that with this senile old man?

“Ohh, I see. How thoughtless of me.”

The old man was getting tricked!

That old man was really built and muscular despite his age, and I could swear the buttons on the snug suit he was wearing were about to fly off.

I think this was Sera and Saras's boss, and his name was Genkunrou.

Once again, the right timing had slipped away... it would be awkward for me to join in now, so I left. Maybe I should take a trip to the bathroom?

All the rooms looked the same in this karaoke place, so it was easy to get lost.

I entered the well-maintained bathroom, and saw that there was one private stall and a place to wash your hands.

“Ooo, I really need to go...”

I was truly just an average high school guy as I rushed full-speed for the bathroom. Well... I guess not a hundred percent, since I was also a zombie.

The stall didn't seem to be in use, but I knocked anyways just in case before opening the door. When I did, I found a man with an unkempt beard sitting on the toilet with the lid down, looking like he had just come out of a life-or-death battle with José Mendoza.¹⁸

Ohoh, my handsome baron, so this is where you were.

“What a waste to spend the party here.”

“You saw it, right? That big toast war. I really can't keep up with that. The gulf between the vampire ninjas goes much deeper than I had imagined...”

Stop getting so depressed just because you had to drink a cup of hot oolong tea really quickly. Are you seriously that sick or something?

¹⁸Character from Ashita no Joe.

“Not feeling too well then? You wanna head home early?”

“I can't. But... what should I do...?”

“Hm. What if I told Sera to stick with you and keep an eye out?”

I suddenly remembered that Sera was all by herself. If she could move around with the demon baron then she could probably talk with the other vampire ninjas.

“Sera?”

“Hm? Seraphim. She's one of the conservative faction ninjas, and she's living in my house right now—”

“Hm? Ah, okay okay. That girl with a ponytail, right? She has a nice body...”
Cough cough!

The demon baron turned around and spat out a large amount of blood onto the toilet.

“Ugh! My doctor ordered me to stop thinking dirty thoughts...”

“You... I'm pretty impressed you've managed to keep all this a secret.”

“So, why did you bring up that Sera girl?”

“Ahh, she's the same type of girl as Saras, which is to say she's a good girl and is really attentive in whatever she does.”

“I see. Okay, I'll leave it to her then.”

“You agreed to that pretty easily.”

“That's how much I trust you. No, rather, there isn't anybody else I can rely on here. At this point, I'd be willing to rely on a meowing fuzzball.”

You could've just said *cat*, dammit... Geez, this guy was annoying. Ugh, don't wink at me. That's just gross.

“But while we're talking about Sera... I do have one request.”

“Make sure it's only one, `kay?”

God, so annoying. I continued talking, all the while holding back the desire to take a pair of tweezers to his ugly beard.

“I want you to give her a mission. I don't care what... but just something so that she can continue living with us.”

Sera's mission was to ask Yuu to turn the demon baron into a zombie. However, because the demon baron was alive, that mission was now over. So... she had no reason to stay at my house anymore.

And that... that was...

“Well, that's no problem at all. I mean...”

“What is it? Why are you making a face like that?”

“It's nothing, it's nothing. I was just so sure you and Eucliwood were together... well, I guess with that body... cough, cough! Ugh, just remembering it made me cough blood...”

“Nah, that's not true. This is for Yuu's sake too, as right now Sera's been doing all the chores around the house. If she's not there to clean, Haruna would quickly mess up the entire house. Also, I really don't want to have to wash Haruna and Yuu's underwear.”

“I got it. I got it, Aikawa Ayumu-kun. It's quite fun watching you get so desperate. I now know why Ariel has taken such a liking to you.”

“Shut up...”

I could feel myself blushing, so I turned away from the demon baron. These damn people, all mocking me...

Oh, wait... my cell phone was vibrating. A text? Ah, it was from Orito. Looks like the mixer was about to start.

“Well, I'll leave the rest to you then. I have to go somewhere else. As for Saras... uhh... just tell her I went to the bathroom or something.”

“Got it. I'll entrust everything to that Sera girl. Are you sure you want to leave? You might be able to get information on Chris's whereabouts here.”

“... I think I can learn about Chris's weak points where I'm going. Also... I

really can't stand this atmosphere."

"You're pretty delicate for a zombie, aren't you?"

Whatever. Just say whatever you want.

I turned my back and walked away, waving farewell, my hand in the air.

Sorry, Saras... for bailing even though you invited me.



Listen up! The difference between an amateur and a pro is how much you can make your practice pay off during the real match!

That's why pros have to practice 'til they drop.

I'm a super pro of course, so of course I came prepared!

So, I hope we get along at the mixer! And don't get the wrong idea, okay?!

Hoeh? Ayumu is sexually harassing someone again?

Well, he practices it everyday.

He's a pro, you know. A pro. Yeah.



Chapter 2 - Well, Dessler Really Seems Like He'd be Good at Billiards!: Part 1

It was around a five minute walk from the vampire ninja party in Giroppon¹⁹.

For our mixer, we had chosen... a darts bar. Somewhere I really don't think students go very often.

The thing is, Anderson-kun (who was really excited for this mixer, by the way) was a regular customer at this place, so he had way too many coupons that he needed to use. Not to mention we were getting a group discount. Also, we thought if we were going to hold an adult-style party then we might as well do it in an adult place.

There were more people attending this party than I had expected. More than thirty people were gathered at the darts bar.

I spotted some familiar faces in that sea of people...

There was a flat-chested girl with shoulder-length chestnut hair and a trademark ahoge... Haruna.

There was another flat-chested girl with silver hair falling to her waist, clad in her trademark Western-style armor... Yuu.

There was a girl from the basketball team, whose motto was ``never walk outside without makeup!''... Mihara Kanami.

And there was the super-handsome guy who was tall enough to dunk... Anderson-kun.

Also, there was some Orito-looking... whatever.

All the guys had to bring a cute girl with them to get into the party, so most of the unfamiliar faces in the crowd were girls.

After everyone had gathered in front of the shop, we were led inside by Anderson-kun.

The bar's interior was really spacious. It felt like a bar you'd expect to see in a Western film, with long wooden counters, three darts machines, and two

¹⁹Another name for Roppongi.

billiard tables. It seemed like our meal was already prepared, and I saw Mexican food lined up on the tables.

“Oh, welcome welcome! I baked some pizza for you!”

A very welcoming shopkeeper beckoned us inside. He looked... around thirty-five? Pretty young to own a shop.

“Sorry for asking you to do so much. You even laid out food and soft drinks for us...”

“It's fine, it's fine! We'll rent out the shop any day if it's for Shimamura-kun! We're gonna open up at night though, at around seven or so... that's fine, right?”

“Thanks. You've been a huge help, man.”

“In return, make sure you come here some more, okay? There are some customers who come just for Shitamura-kun~~.”

The two of them smiled lightly at each other.

The students all began to take their seats in groups. I hung up my favorite jacket and sat at a corner table. Soon, pizza was brought over to us.

“T-This is alfredo ganahson LVS, model zero!”

Haruna's ahoge bounced back and forth as she leaned back in her chair and widened her eyes in shock.

It is only a pizza. “Haruna-chan, this is just a normal pizza~~.”

Yuu responded with that emotionlessly.

“... Ah, I see. I guess Alfredo and Ganahson don't exist in this world.”

Haruna wiped the sweat from her forehead and let out a sigh of relief. Everyone else smiled.

“Hey, Aikawa, you stupid perv.”

In came a guy wearing an overly fashionable jacket, his spiky hair pointier than ever. He frowned at me.

“What's with the ‘perv’ bit all of a sudden? What do you want?”

“What happened to these cute girls you were talking about? Sure, Haruna-chan and Yuu-chan are both super pretty, but I was the one who invited them, right?”

“These two live with me, so they don't count as points in your favor. Try again.”

“Hmph! Aikawa, don't underestimate me! There are still other girls! I brought a girl that you'd never think would go to an event like this!”

I really couldn't imagine that there were many pretty girls who would come to a mixer like this with a huge perv like Orito, so which kind-hearted girl had he...

As Orito smiled, a pretty girl with pigtails all of a sudden appeared from Orito's shadow.

Hiramatsu at a mixer? That really didn't seem like her. Hiramatsu already had trouble talking to people while making eye contact – that's why she was always looking down. She was a very kind girl, though.

She wore a pink, knitted cardigan, a fluttering skirt, and boots. She was also looking down at the ground somewhat uncomfortably.

“... He said... Aikawa-kun would... be here... so... umm...”

Hiramatsu's face flushed slightly red. I really started to pity this girl... I quickly joined my hands together and bowed in thanks at her.

Just like that, I ended up with Yuu, Orito, and Hiramatsu at my table. Haruna was wandering all over the place, and Anderson-kun was at the counter, pretty much monopolizing all the other girls.

I see. All the other high school girls really had eyes only for the hunky Anderson-kun.

“Now that I think about it...”

“What's up?”

“Who exactly did Anderson-kun bring to the mixer?”

“Maybe we should ask. Hey, Anderson-kun!”

Anderson-kun turned his neck to look at us. *You called?* he seemed to be asking.

“Who did Anderson-kun bring-”

At that exact moment:

“Ayumu Ayumu Ayumu!”

Haruna came over from the billiard tables, a smile plastered on her face from ear to ear.

She had a cute owl in her arms, looking almost like she was holding onto a stuffed animal.

“What's this thing?! It's really fluffy! This is the first time I've seen a weird bird like this!”

The bird had a stumpy body, short legs, and some pretty sharp talons. Well, owls were carnivorous birds of prey, after all... like eagles or falcons.

... but seriously, why was there an owl here?

“I brought that horned owl over there. Cute, isn't she?”

Ah, it was a horned owl. It had some tufts of feathers on its head that looked almost like ears, so that made it a horned owl, not a normal owl.

Yeah, I admit it was cute... but just look at how disappointed Orito was. His glasses were as sad as I'd ever seen them.

“Actually, it's pretty lame!” Orito muttered.

However, the high-pitched squeals of “It's sooo cute~~!” coming from all the girls around Anderson-kun won this battle. It was clear that he was the life of the party over there.

All of the guys sitting at the tables, including me, felt left out, and also had a sense of defeat at seeing just how easy the handsome people had it.

“Ahh, this is soo...”

Haruna seemed to almost fall into a trance as her ahoge whipped back and forth.

With eyes that big and round, this animal might as well have been classified as a feline. Those feathers sure did look like ears...

... Well, the way it went ``hoo" was certainly pretty cute... but that was a bit different.

``Agh! Someone used fabric softener on this thing, didn't they?!"

Nobody used fabric softener! Haruna hugged the fluffy horned owl close to her as she rubbed her cheeks on the creature's fur.

``Hoo, hoo."

You know, this was a pretty tame owl. Were birds of prey supposed to be this friendly? Owls were like eagles or hawks, right? But the owl shut her eyes as Haruna stroked her on the cheek, making her seem even more feline.

``... Hawaahh... cute..."

Hiramatsu was also watching the owl, completely spellbound.

Even I started wanting to pet the owl, and I walked over to Haruna.

``Alright, let's order drinks."

``Eh? Acorns? For her?"²⁰

Haruna blinked a few times. You idiot, the owl's not going to eat acorns! She's a *carnivore*!

``Hoo." The owl hooted with perfect timing, almost as if responding to what Haruna had said. ``There, there," Haruna replied, stroking it around its neck.

``Aikawa, is cola okay for you?"

I heard Orito's voice from afar, and I reached out to pet the owl. But then...

``Hooo!" The owl stuck its beak right into me.

²⁰Drink here is ``dorinku." Acorn is ``donguri." Maybe later I'll actually try to make this wordplay work in English, but for now you get this footnote.

Damn, this owl really was on its guard! Also, that totally sounded like Michael Jackson, didn't it?

“She's saying Ayumu is gross.”

Haruna laughed at me, and I found myself getting a bit annoyed.

“Orito! Come over here for a bit.”

Orito came over, and I asked him to try patting the horned owl on the head. And then...

“Owwwwwwww!!”

The owl struck with her beak again.

“See, Haruna? It's not because I'm gross.”

“Well, yeah. That guy is gross too. Umm... Ondola, or something, right?”

“Hoo hoo.” The owl nodded, almost like it was agreeing with Haruna.

“What the hell is that? Are we shooting an episode of Rose of Versailles or something? It's Orito.”

“You two, shut up and raise your glasses.”

Orito urged us on, and both Haruna and I picked up our cola glasses.

As everyone stood there with their glasses filled with ginger ale, Lemon Squash, or cola, our mixer organizer took the lead on the toast.

“Umm, thanks everyone for coming here today. Ahh, there sure are a lot of people here. Umm, well, the more cheers and breasts there are in the world, the better, so... cheers!”

..... Five seconds of dead silence elapsed, and then everyone raised their glasses as if nothing had happened.

“Cheers!”

The sounds of students cheering and glasses clinking rang around me.

Nobody tried to go over to where Orito was. As for me... I sent Haruna's glass

flying.

“Uwaah! What the hell?! Ayumu, you idiot!”

Ahh, after that huge cheers war with the vampire ninjas, I accidentally used my zombie strength there.

The horned owl seemed to have decided I was its enemy, though, and attacked me with its eagle-like beak. It was almost like it was reacting to Haruna's emotions.

“Ohh! Go! Kir Royale!”²¹

“Hooo!”

The owl's eyes sparkled as she unfurled her wings while perched on Haruna's right hand and opened its mouth. Wow, this owl could even respond to really random, obscure things!

Orito came over to clink his glass with mine, but I ended up sending his glass flying to the side.

Yuu also came over, but I also ended up overdoing it with her too.

... I had thought I was one of the smooth ones too...

“Aikawa... you... are pretty bad at cheers.”

“Ah, no, this is...”

Clink. I met Orito's glass with too much force, and some of the cola in mine spilled out.

Suddenly, laughter spilled out around me.

“Aha... Aikawa-kun... I never expected you would be bad at clinking glasses.”

Hiramatsu chuckled at me. It felt like she was treating me like some pervy little kid who was bad at clinking glasses... but just as I was sinking into depression, Hiramatsu took out a shogi board.

²¹Reference to Bandit King Jing, who has an owl Kir as his partner. Credits to Imperial-sama for pointing this out.

“Shogi? Hiramatsu, you like shogi?”

“Yeah... I... thought I'd definitely be alone here... so I brought it.”

She had absolutely no desire to go to a mixer, did she?! Yuu's eyes lit up when she saw the shogi pieces scattered out on the board.

Yuu was now looking right in Hiramatsu's direction. She also probably didn't really come here with any serious intention to meet others. Why in the world did she decide to come, anyways?

“Ah... want to play?”

Yes, please.

Yuu gave Hiramatsu a deep bow and beckoned her toward a corner of the room. They moved to a quieter part of the bar and began setting up the shogi pieces with practiced movements.

A bunch of guys noticed those two setting up their game, and even though they weren't too sure how they could intrude into this quiet scene, some of them still pretended to want to watch and began to draw near the two girls. Seeing that, I quickly stood in their way, like the Secret Service protecting the President.

I wouldn't let any worthless bugs latch onto Yuu! Seeing my impenetrable wall of defense, the guys gave up and went off to join other groups. Good... good.

In a sense, one coupling had already succeeded at this mixer. Like Yuu and Hiramatsu, groups of people began to form all over the bar.

“... So, I still have this habit of threes, and I pick ‘defend defend defend,’ then ‘cancel cancel cancel,’ and then I end up picking ‘attack!’”

There were a bunch of guys surrounding Haruna right now (she was a very pretty girl after all), but they couldn't really keep up with her randomness and seemed puzzled.

Clearly, all that practice had come to nothing.

“What are you talking about?”

A guy retorted with a laugh, but Haruna brought down a karate chop on the

top of his head.

“Shut up! It's common sense!”

“Ehh...” The guy looked a bit helpless as his tears welled up at Haruna's merciless attack.

“You understand, right?”

“Hoo.” The owl hooted almost in synch with the end of Haruna's sentence.

Maybe the other guys all thought that it looked like the owl was agreeing with Haruna. The fact that they were all undaunted, now nodding and agreeing with Haruna, was probably a testament to how much they wanted to get to know such a pretty girl.

At this rate, I doubted anybody would end up hooking up with Haruna that night.

How was everyone else doing? Wondering that, I took a look around the room.

Orito and Mihara were in the same group, and had just been eating pizza and salad the entire time. There were a few guys and a few girls in their group, but the conversation seemed completely stagnant.

“Doesn't the first kanji in the word for ‘canyon’ look like the same kanji in the word for ‘lewd’?”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“Everyone who thinks you have to be an E-cup to have big breasts, raise your hand~~.”

Orito tried that, but everyone ignored him.

I mean, who the hell would ask girls a survey question like that?

Looked like Orito was swinging and completely missing. Next... there was Yuu and Hiramatsu's little duet.

On the seventy-fourth move of the game, Hiramatsu suddenly let out an “Ahh...” of surprise.

“What... this is...”

It seemed she had realized something, and Yuu handed her a memo.

You were a worthy opponent.

Eh? Yuu had won? After that, the two of them began quickly moving the shogi pieces. It was almost like I was watching a shogi commentary show... they were moving so quickly that I could've sworn they were playing cards, not shogi.

And then... Yuu won.

Sigh... Hiramatsu let out a sigh and took off her shoes, sitting now in the traditional proper Japanese style atop her chair.

“Would you like... to play again?”

I saw a fire in Hiramatsu's eyes that I had never seen before. Did this mean she had suddenly gotten serious?

Just what I was hoping for.

Like that, the second match began. Yuu and Hiramatsu silently moved their pieces around the board... it was an atmosphere that was really hard to intrude upon. It was almost like they were in their own little world.

Before I realized it, I was alone. Well, there were plenty of toys here, so I should go try some of them out.

I walked across the sea of lively tables and found myself in the center of the bar, where there were two billiard tables set up.

Anderson-kun was there with his fanclub.

Maybe it was because he was a regular here, but Anderson-kun was really good at billiards. I mean, if it ever got to his turn, the game would pretty much be over. You could barely call this a match. Man, billiards sure was a high-class game...

When I saw him there, polishing the end of his cue stick, his elbow was perfectly bent and his legs spread at the perfect distance, I could've sworn he was a pro hustler.

But more importantly, I was really impressed by how he could just smile and look so positive with all the girls shrilly squealing around him.

How could he have all that shrieking going off near his ears but still keep his concentration?

At that point, Haruna also came over, along with the people who were trying to hook up with her.

“He's like... umm... D-Dessler or something.”

Haruna stood there with a shocked expression, like she was one of the gentlemen of the Yamato.²²

“Well, Dessler really seems like he'd be good at billiards!”

But was she sure she wasn't mixing up “hustler” with “Dessler”?

“Hoo hoo.” The owl hooted again, sounding impressed.

That owl could show such a wide range of emotions through just hooting...

“Wanna try?”

Anderson-kun held out a cue stick to Haruna, who was standing to the side holding the owl.

“Alright! Bring it on!” Haruna picked up the cue ball and held the cue stick up.

She almost looked like some demonic coach who was about to put his baseball team through an exhausting practice. Also, she was the one with the ball in her hands... why the hell was she saying “bring it on”...?

“Hey, what the hell do you think you're doing?! Weren't you watching earlier?! That's not how you play!”

“Hueh?”

Crack! I was pretty surprised that Haruna managed to hit the cue ball dead center and send it flying, but I was more surprised at the owl, who flew after the ball and caught it in her sharp talons.

²²Reference to a character in Space Battleship Yamato.

“Ohh! Let's do that again! Again!”

“Hoo kay.”

“Don't do that anymore! ... Also, did that owl just say `okay'?”

“Hoo?” The owl cocked its head to the side in puzzlement. The one thing I managed to get from all of this was that this owl could definitely understand human speech.

I desperately tried to stop Haruna, but she wouldn't listen. I'd already known that, though, so I tried to forcibly snatch the cue stick away from her.

But before I could do that, Anderson-kun grabbed Haruna's hand.

“Want to learn? How to play.”

Sweet breath flowed from Anderson-kun's sweet-looking face. Their heights were so different that it almost looked like Anderson-kun was covering Haruna's entire body with his own... I had no idea why, but I started to frown.

“Shut up! Don't make it sound like I don't know!”

Haruna's attitude didn't change even if she was talking to a really good-looking guy. She was like a vacuum cleaner that never changed its suction power settings.

My cell phone began to vibrate. This kind of vibration meant... a phone call?

I thought it was a call from Dai-sensei, so I picked it up without even looking at the display screen.

“Ah, hello. You already here?”

“Hm? You... what are you going on about?”

This aggressive voice... this was Saras, wasn't it? ... Crap. I was careless.

“Eh... well... um, it's nothing.”

“What are you doing? Didn't you just leave to use the restroom?”

“Ah, nah... that's... um, there was a Megalo...”

“Megalo?”

“The demons that you vampire ninjas exterminate. I went off to deal with one... yeah.”

“I see. I apologize. I had doubted you for a moment there... shall I go and help?”

“Eh? Well... the meeting over there is already over?”

“Yes, the meeting has concluded.”

“Well, that's too bad. You went out of your way to invite me... I hope you'll invite me next time too.”

“Hey, you piece-of-shit darling. Are you saying you're going to miss my live performance?”

“Live performance? Can't say I've heard anything about that.”

“Did I forget to mention it? ... After the meeting, there will be a live concert to celebrate the return of our chief.”

I hadn't known about that at all. Well, I did feel a bit guilty about leaving her at the party all of a sudden, so...

“Yeah, I'll definitely go check it out. When and where is it?”

I walked over to Yuu as I asked Saras that. I took a memo sheet from her and wrote down the time and address of the concert before putting the sheet in my pocket. They'd be playing the concert at a live music bar, starting from five in the evening.

“You'll definitely come? My darling.”

“Yeah, it's a promise. I'll be there.”

“... Ahh, this must be the first time I've heard a promise like that... that makes me happy.”

We hung up the call and I put my phone back in my pocket. A few seconds later, it began to vibrate again. I sighed and once again picked up the phone.

It wasn't rare for someone to hang up the phone, then realize they had forgotten to say something and call again. When the timing was as poor as this, though, I just had to shake my head.

“What do you want?”

I spoke a bit irritably into the phone, but then realized I really had no reason to be upset and regretted my tone immediately. I quickly corrected myself.

“Sorry. I guess I'm in a bit of a bad mood.”

I followed up with that.

Suddenly, I heard a sing-song voice on the other side, sounding like it could barely hold in a laugh.

“Ayumu-san~~, you have a cute side once in a while too~~.”

“D-Dai-sensei! Ah, sorry, that was...”

“We were thinking we might head over juuust around now~~... would you please let us know your coordinates~~?”

As expected, when she realized I was uncomfortable, she didn't try to push the issue and just kept the conversation on track. What a mature response. If this was Haruna or Tomonori, they'd burst out laughing for three minutes and then would start going “Hm, what? What was that just now?”

“Oh, wait just a second.”

I moved from the billiards area to the relatively uncrowded counter and got the address of the bar from one of the shop employees. I relayed the information to Dai-sensei.

“I understand~~. Well then...”

The minute the phone call cut out, the bar's front door opened.

“Good afternoon~~.”

So fast! Were they already on the way here during the phone call? In either case, Dai-sensei had appeared. Today, instead of wearing her usual white lab coat, she was wearing some cute casual clothes.

And that was definitely Kyouko next to her. When I had first met Kyouko, her hair had been tied into twintails, but this time her hair was left straight. I saw that her hair was slightly longer than Haruna's. She was wearing a normal one-piece, but there was also a bracelet on her arm with some strange-looking runes carved into it. Were those kind of like her handcuffs?

I heard a clanging noise behind me, and turned around to see that Yuu had stood up in shock from her shogi game (even though her facial expression still didn't change), and Haruna was now trembling and holding the cue stick like she was ready for a fight.

... Now that I thought about it, I had never told those two that Kyouko was coming.

“Why are you here?!”

Haruna's ahoge stood straight on end and she pointed her cue stick at Kyouko. She looked like a growling puppy, honestly.

“Haruna-san, Aikawa-senpai. It's been quite a while.”

Kyouko was putting on her best smile. It was a cute, angelic smile that would make a normal guy go “oh my god I'm in love~~!!” immediately.

“Aikawa, nice one! This is way more than I expected!”

Orito looked like a panting pit bull right now. At least wipe away your drool, dammit.

“Cute, aren't they?”

I tried to brag a bit, but Orito ignored me and went over to Kyouko, using the most hunky voice he could come up with.

“Whatever would your name be?”

He was trying to act completely like Prince Charming.

“Ah, Orito-senpai, right? What an honor to meet you here.”

Kyouko flashed her pearly white death at Orito, and Orito was overcome with emotion. He wiped tears away from his eyes.

“D-Did you hear that, Aikawa?! Looks like my time of youth has finally come!”

... S-Shut up, idiot. Orito-san, you're being tricked, you know.

“How is your little sister doing?”

“Eh? Wait, don't tell me you already know about my family? She's doing so well I had to whack her on the head for it yesterday.”

Hah hah hah. Orito let out a booming laugh, clearly in high spirits.

Now that I thought about it, when Kyouko had come to this world for the first time, she had been friends with Orito's sister. Actually, I was first introduced to Kyouko through Orito.

As a result, they should've been more familiar with each other, but masou shoujo had the ability to wipe people's memories. When Kyouko was imprisoned in Virie after committing various crimes, she had probably been erased from the memories of the people here who were involved.

When I saw them talking now as if this was their first meeting, I gathered that it was impossible to restore those erased memories.

“So, who are these two?”

Mihara watched Orito unhappily as he took Kyouko's hand and began to stroke it.

“Umm... the loli with the huge breasts is Kyouko, and the twintailed one is...”

Dai-sensei's name was... Ariel, right?

“Ah, it's Aa... rie-... Rie! It's Rie-chan!”

Wow! What a brilliant idea that was!

“I'm Aikawa-senpai's kouhai, Kyouko. Nice to meet you.”

Kyouko bent down into a deep bow. Her collar opened up a bit, and her full, ripe breasts spilled out. Well, it's not like I could see them, but from the angle Orito was at I'm sure it was easy.

“I'm Rie, Haruna's friend~~. Thank you very much for inviting me here

today~~."

Dai-sensei gave a quick bow.

Kyouko still stood there giving everyone her angelic smile.

All the guys in the room grew wild with excitement at the sight of these two. Their eyes were especially drawn to Kyouko's bust, which was way too big to match with her youthful face. Well, when you have a jewel that bright then it's meant to be on display, I guess. I couldn't really tear my eyes away from there either.

Anyways, with the appearance of these two girls, the groups in the bar began to shuffle around a bit.

The girls were all stuck to Anderson-kun, Hiramatsu and Yuu were stuck to their shogi game, and Haruna and Orito were as randomly pointless as always. For normal people, this wasn't really a very fun mixer.

But then, two really beautiful girls had been thrown into the mix.

Of course, everyone would want to get to know them.

They were bright girls, full of smiles. Just that alone was enough to draw everyone else to them. I really believed that having a cute face in and of itself was a skill. A skill you were born with.

-

You never expected people to match up to their appearances, but you judged them for those appearances nevertheless.

-

The two girls smiled as the other guys began to treat them like royal princesses.

The minute Kyouko and Dai-sensei sat down, a huge battle erupted over who would get to sit next to them.

``Want a drink? This stuff is reaaaally good."

People held out cider and cola to them, scrambling to be the first.

“Here, have a cup. Let me pour some out for you.”

“Oh, no! I can't make you do that!”

Kyouko was so cute when she waved her hands that everyone around her began to smile.

I had already fulfilled my end of the bargain, so I wanted to go and ask them about Chris's weak point, but when I got close to them all the guys growled at me like lions. I really didn't know what to do here.

“Don't give it to me. Give it to Rie-san please.”

Ahh, what a good girl she was... at least, she was so cute, and her smile so sweet that I couldn't help but think that. Rie... who was that again? Ah, I was the one who came up with that name too... she was talking about Dai-sensei.

“Okay, Rie-chan, here...”

“Ahh, bubbly drinks are a bit...”

When you heard Dai-sensei's gentle, easy-going voice, time just stood still. You got the feeling you could spend an eternity listening to that wonderful voice...

“Hey! Hey, Ayumu!”

Haruna beckoned me over from the billiard tables, with the owl perched on her shoulder.

I could see nothing but her hands and her ahoge. Even if she wasn't showing her face, it was immediately clear who that ahoge belonged to. I sighed, wondering what she wanted, and headed over in her direction.

I found Yuu there as well. Hadn't she been playing shogi?

Ah, I looked over and saw that Hiramatsu was staring at the shogi board without moving a muscle. It didn't seem like she was in that much trouble, but she was just taking a while to think. Had she not realized that Kyouko and Dai-sensei had come in? Wow, what amazing powers of concentration she had...

When I got to Haruna, she suddenly pulled me by the ear.

“What the hell is it?”

It didn't hurt. Haruna knew that, so she was pulling my ear with such force that I swear it was about to fall off. She brought my ear close to her mouth. But instead of whispering, she yelled loudly.

“Why is that girl here?!”

I shut one eye at the unpleasant sensation of my ear ringing.

“You mean Kyouko? Well, because she's cuter than you.”

“What?! There's nobody cuter than me!”

“Really? This is the first I've heard of that.”

Ayumu. Please answer.

Yuu's emotionless eyes were pleading with me to stop joking.

“Kyouko might know a way to stop Chris. Please try to understand.”

“..... As if I could!”

After thinking a bit, Haruna threw both her arms up in the air and raised a protest. Well, I guess that makes sense. Kyouko had caused Haruna a lot of trouble in the past, and so the fact that Kyouko might know a way to take Chris down still didn't make it easy for Haruna to enjoy a party with her.

I understand.

“Yuu, you...”

“Huh? Gloomy necromancer?! You...”

This is for Haruna.

I saw a great deal of determination in Yuu's beautiful blue eyes. She had always regretted causing Haruna pain during the school festival due to her own selfishness.

So, she was willing to do anything if it could help Haruna. That's probably how she thought.

“Hm. Well, if it's for me, then I guess that's fine... well, if she has that bracelet on I don't think she can try anything funny anyways.”

“Bracelet?”

“That bracelet she's wearing. It'll shock her if she tries to use magic. I've seen a prisoner at school wearing one of those before, but it shocked her way too much and she fainted.”

I see, so Kyouko couldn't use any magic. In other words, she couldn't really exhibit her full strength as a masou shoujo. Well, in that case, I think we were safe.

“I'm a bit relieved then. I mean, I wouldn't really want to bring someone so dangerous here either.”

“... So, Dai-sensei did, right? Dai-sensei's love of parties is just legendary, so I'm sure she's the one who had the idea, right? Alright! We'll definitely get the info out of them!”

Both Yuu and I nodded together at Haruna's statement.

“Ah, no, that's not true!”

“Nah, you really are cute! Seriously!”

“Ahah! Thank you. Ah, that's... so embarrassing to hear...”

When I took a look at Kyouko, I saw that she was quickly becoming the life of the party.

“Ahahaha! You really are cute! Kyouko-chan, do you have a boyfriend?”

Orito was sitting right across from Kyouko, and he was talking down to her breasts, not to her face.

“Not at all, not at all! Boyfriend? Don't be silly!”

Kyouko blushed and waved her hand back and forth as she laughingly responded like that.

Unfortunately, neither a zombie nor a necromancer could muster up enough courage to butt into that scene and talk to her.

How exactly were we supposed to get to her in this situation?

“A girl who denies it like that clearly is well aware that she's cute. Why do guys go and get tricked by girls putting on obvious acts like that? Seriously, this is all just lip service.”

Mihara was nearby eating a pizza, muttering, and just looking very sad.

Ah, this might be the beginning of a way out. I chatted up to Mihara as she began to sulk.

“Lip service? What do you mean?”

“Ahh, Ayumu the hentai. Hmm, well... say I get into an accident and break my arm, and then I come to school with a cast. What would you say to me?”

“Eh? ... Hmm, well, I'd probably ask ‘What happened? Are you okay?’ or something.”

“Oh yeah, I'm fine, I'm fine! Just a teeny accident.”

Mihara waved her hands just like Kyouko had been doing, opened her eyes wide, and used a voice that was way too cute to be considered normal.

After that, she began to sulk again.

“I broke a damn bone, right? Of course I'm not alright. But I'm going to say ‘Yeah, I'm alright!’ if anybody asks me about it. If someone says ‘You're cute!’ I'd go ‘No, that's not true at all!’ That's lip service.”

“Ahh, I guess that kind of stuff happens pretty often too.”

“She's just saying she's not cute because she knows saying that will make her look the cuter. Ugh, putting on the cute act like that...”

Well, I knew what Kyouko was really like anyways. Wait, actually... if the others knew what Kyouko was really like as well, then they'd probably all just start gravitating towards Dai-sensei instead, right? Alrighty then...

“Haruna, what do you think about Kyouko? You're jealous of her big breasts, aren't you?”

“Huh? Nah, those breasts are just pointlessly big!”

It was times like these when Haruna's shameless personality came in handy.

Kyouko still kept that angelic smile of hers on her face, but I saw her visibly stiffen.

Pointlessly big. A no-breasted girl like Haruna had just called the breasts she was so proud of ``pointless." Of course she'd get annoyed at that.

``I'm jealous of Haruna-san though. It's so rare to have breasts so *small*... you could almost say it makes you rather exotic."

``You can't see them, but they're there."

Are your breasts made of dark matter or something?

``I see. Yes, and that certainly is perfect in its own way, isn't it?"

The boys around Kyouko laughed boisterously at her words, draining Haruna of her last stores of patience. Granted, Haruna's stores of patience might as well have been held in a bag tied together with a limp noodle.

``I challenge you then! Let's decide here once and for all whose breasts are more amazing!"

Haruna pointed her cue stick at Kyouko.

``Billiards? Just to warn you, but I'm pretty good at billiards."

Kyouko held up her arms in a small guts pose and stood up.

... At this rate, I didn't really see how I was going to be able to ask Kyouko questions. Also, this might end really badly for Haruna.

``Oh, what~~? I want to try tooo~~."

Dai-sensei followed up with that and walked over to us.

``Hooooo..."

The owl next to Haruna suddenly seemed to shrink in on itself.

Owls usually were covered by fluffy feathers, but when they wanted to appear threatening they could puff up and make those feathers even fluffier.

When they were afraid, they shrunk down and tried to make themselves look as thin as a branch. Neither I nor Haruna knew what this owl was so afraid of, though.

But there was one other person who might know.

Just like the owl, Anderson-kun was staring at Dai-sensei and trembling. Now that I thought about it, Anderson-kun and the owl had quieted down quite a bit ever since Kyouko and Dai-sensei had shown up.

He was shivering like a guy who had been thrown stark naked into the North Pole. This really wasn't normal...

“Anderson-kun, what's wrong?”

The girls around Anderson-kun also seemed worried at this sudden change.

“Ahh, it's... it's nothing... umm...”

His voice was barely audible. It didn't seem like any of the girls' words were getting across to him either. This was exactly what it looked like when a frog was being stared down by a snake.

Kyouko took a step forward, and all the guys squealed.

Dai-sensei took a step forward, and Anderson-kun shook while all the girls squealed.

It seemed that his reaction was specifically towards Dai-sensei.

Tap tap. I felt a gentle tapping on my back and when I turned around, I saw Yuu there with a memo held out to me.

To people of the Underworld, she is like a demon. You cannot fault them for their fear.

I see. Anderson-kun came from the Underworld, and the masou shoujo were his enemies. Dai-sensei was just a different class of masou shoujo, and was insanely powerful.

They say the following in the Underworld.

Yuu had the same emotionless facial expression as she handed me another

memo.

If you meet a snake, kill it before it kills you.

If you meet a bear, run from it before it kills you.

If you meet *her*, then just give up.

I see, so she was literally a demon to the people in the Underworld.

Certainly, I never wanted to fight Dai-sensei if she was being serious. I had never even seen her fighting seriously.

``How's this? Take that!"

Hiramatsu suddenly raised her hand, a look of determination in her eyes, seeming to be enjoying herself quite a bit. After that, Yuu looked from me to Kyouko, and then back to Hiramatsu. She thought for a bit... and then went back to her shogi game.

... Didn't seem like I could count on her for any help here. Well, she did love her shogi, so I couldn't blame her...

Yuu returned to her seat, made her move, and Hiramatsu once again fell into deep thought, with a serious expression on her face.

I got a bit worried for Anderson-kun, so I spoke up to him.

``You okay? Want to take a break in the corner?"

``Ahh... yeah, maybe..."

Maybe the other girls had gotten a bit turned off by Anderson-kun's change, or maybe they were showing self-restraint, but I managed to escort him alone to the corner.

The owl perched on Haruna's shoulder also seemed to want to run away from Kyouko and Dai-sensei, and it silently flew over to us.

Owls had special plumage that allowed them to fly while making very little noise.

Anderson-kun took a deep drink from his cola and shrunk down to the floor

behind the billiard table, almost like he was trying to hide. I also sat next to him.

“Ahh, I'm so surprised. To think I'd find a masou shoujo with that much magical power coming here...”

“Sorry... there's a reason for all this. But, I mean, Dai-sensei really isn't that scary.”

“They have a certain saying in the Underworld, you know...”

“Oh, you mean that you should give up if you ever meet with her? Yeah, Yuu told me about that earlier.”

“Aikawa, when they told me that, I had no idea who the *her* they were talking about was. But now I realize that they didn't need to tell you. It's instantly clear when you meet her for the first time.”

Anderson-kun laughed as he said that. His shaking had not stopped.

“Hey, Anderson-kun. Why exactly did you come to this world?”

“I guess I'm just here observing. You know, I dispatch Megalo if I see the masou shoujo are doing something weird. Well, lately they haven't really been too active, so I've just been trying to enjoy my life.”

“Doing something weird? Like what?”

“For example, if they make a lot of fake Megalo and start sending them everywhere.”

“That wasn't the masou shoujo, though.”

“Ah, yeah, I know that now. Back then, though, we were all afraid that Virie had developed the technology to make their own Megalo. We thought they were about to invade!”

Kyouko and the King of the Night had been the ones making the fake Megalo in an attempt to throw this world into a state of war. I see, things had panned out exactly as the King of the Night had hoped.

“This is just a personal and probably ignorant opinion, so I'm sorry if this puts you in a bad mood, but... why can't you just pull all the masou shoujo in the

Underworld and fight them there?"

“Hm, that's a bit hard. You can't really fight without restraint if it's in your home turf.”

Now that I thought about it, we had met plenty of Megalo that were destroying buildings and trying to get to their objective by any means necessary.

I wish they *would* show a bit of restraint...

Well then, back to the billiards game. It seemed that Haruna and Kyouko's billiards competition had turned into something completely nonsensical.

Haruna hit the white cue ball flying with her cue stick...

“That was definitely a home run!”

She said that while puffing out her chest. Even if she puffed out her chest, it's not like she could make something out of nothing. Her chest was more of... a philosophical construct.

“Ugh! That's not how you play billiards!”

Kyouko was angrily banging on the billiards table. Just by slouching forwards, I could see her huge breasts jiggling back and forth.

“Well, what should we do then~~?”

Dai-sensei was spinning the cue stick around like a baton. Hey, stop that! That's dangerous, dammit!

“You hit this white ball here and make the numbered balls fall in order into the pockets.”

Kyouko pointed and quickly explained the game.

“Like this, right?!”

Haruna threw the white ball and hit the number one ball squarely into a hole.

“... Fine. Whatever... that's fine.”

Kyouko seemed to have realized that no matter how angry she got, it would be pointless, so she just mumbled quietly.

“Okay, it's my turn nowww~~.”

“Eh? No, Haruna knocked a ball in, so she gets another-”

But Dai-sensei just picked up the white ball. And then...

Bwwwnnn. The ball seemed to sink into the table, and then for some physical reason I couldn't understand, a shockwave rang out and threw every other ball on the table into a hole.

“What happens when all the balls go into the holes at the same time~~?”

“Eh? What was that just now...?” “Magic?” “Was the table that old...?”

The audience began to mutter in puzzled tones at the inexplicable thing that had just happened.

This was bad. I really wanted to hide the fact that she was a masou shoujo. Otherwise, things might get pretty annoying.

I stood up and headed over to Dai-sensei. I was almost like a coach going up to argue with a referee who had made a bad call.

“Hey, sensei. Please hold yourself back a bit...”

Kyouko whispered that into Dai-sensei's ear.

“I *am* holding myself baaack~~.”

“There aren't that many games in this world that involve destroying things.”

“Oh my, oh my. How is that fun~~?”

It seemed that in the magical world Virie, it was common to have fun by destroying things.

“Dai-sensei, Dai-sensei!”

“My my, does Ayumu-san also want to play~~?”

Dai-sensei held her hand out to the ball which had sunk into the table, and it

went whistling back into Dai-sensei's hand like it was being sucked into a vacuum cleaner. The cracked billiards table also returned to normal.

To the other people watching, it was almost like watching a video tape in reverse.

“Ohh!” The sound of cheers rang out around us.

“How did you do that just now?!”

Mihara was probably the easiest to impress amongst all of us, and she stood there with her perfectly mascara'd eyes opened wide.²³

“How? You take space-time and-”

“Can someone please explain the rules properly to Rie-chan?”

Kyouko raised her hands and interjected, trying to prevent Dai-sensei from finishing her sentence. Her plump chest waved, and all the guys in the room suddenly forgot all about what Dai-sensei had done.

Taking that opportunity, I also whispered to Dai-sensei.

“Umm, sorry, but could you try to hide the fact that you're a masou shoujo?”

“Eh? Why~~? We can just erase everyone's memories later~~.”

I see, it was like that. Haruna and the other masou shoujo could just go completely unrestrained and do whatever because they knew they could just fix things up afterwards.

If you had strange powers, then you tended to act selfishly, with yourself in mind.

I should be careful of that too.

“Explain the rules... but... ah, Anderson-kun is really good at explaining things!”

Mihara said that and got Anderson-kun to stand up from his place in the

²³Not sure if this is an intended pun or not, but “easily impressed” here is “miihaa,” which has its roots in the fact that a lot of Japanese girl's given names begin with “mi” and “ha.” Mihara happens to have both syllables in her name.

corner.

Mihara pushed Anderson-kun from behind over to Dai-sensei, who was still smiling and holding the cue stick. Anderson-kun's face had turned dark brown.

“N-N-N-N-Nice to m-m-meet you...”

Anderson-kun was shivering and his teeth were clattering, like a guy who had been to the North Pole to go see the auroras stark naked. Not good! Anderson-kun was going to die of anxiety at this rate!

“Hello. Nice to meet you~~.”

Dai-sensei still looked completely at ease, though. If Dai-sensei knew that Anderson-kun had come from the Underworld, then I don't know if I could guarantee his safety.

He probably felt like there were knives sticking into his throat right now.

“Aikawa-san. Aikawa-san.”

Kyouko beckoned me over, and I walked over while watching Anderson-kun taking Dai-sensei by the hand.

“What? I already did what you asked, so hurry up and just tell me about Chris's weak point.”

“Don't wanna. Ariel-sensei probably plans to just wipe everyone's memory if they figure out what she is. The thing is, I don't want that to happen. I want people to go home and remember how they had spent time having fun with me. So, Aikawa-san... if anybody finds out that we came from another world, or that we're masou shoujo... then I definitely won't talk.”

“That's a completely separate iss-”

“It's not. If we erase everyone's memories, then there wouldn't have been any point of coming here in the first place.”

“I got it. In return, you gotta promise me something. If we get through this safely, then you'll definitely tell me all you know.”

“Ahah! If you're really okay with making promises with a criminal, then I'll

promise you anything you want."

Why was she always such a tease when talking to me?

"Okay then, here I go~~."

Dai-sensei grasped the white cue ball. What was she going to do? I really needed to figure out how to get her away from the billiards table... but how was I supposed to do that?

The balls which had fallen into their pockets floated up into the air. It was almost like some kind of supernatural phenomenon. Well... in reality it kinda was.

"Meka Waru Ef Meka Waru Ef..."

She started chanting some weird spell! A red torrent of magical energy began to swirl around Dai-sensei.

What the hell was she planning to do?! She must've really been enjoying this party! What Kyouko had said earlier repeated in my head. Masou shoujo games usually involved destroying things...

When I looked over at Kyouko, I saw her staring fiercely back at me.

It was like she was saying 'Do something or else things are going to get bad.'

Yeah, I know. It didn't really matter what she ended up destroying. In either case, people would probably start suspecting that she wasn't Japanese...

What should I do? I needed a way to stop this girl... maybe I should do something pervy or something? I just had to draw her attention away from the billiard table.

Hm, maybe this was one of *those* situations. You know, I should just draw her into a heavy kiss and be like 'This is the only way I know how to get a girl to listen' or something? Unfortunately, I really didn't think I was dashing enough to pull that off.

What should I do... what should I do... what should I do...?

I leapt out without really being able to collect my thoughts at all, and I grabbed Dai-sensei's skirt.

And then...

Hip hip, hooray~~.

I lifted up both my hands as if I was doing a cheer.

I had lifted up her skirt a mere two seconds after she had picked up the cue ball.

... I... what in the world was I doing?

Her skirt floated upwards. I caught site of a cute pink pair of panties covering her smallish butt... it was priceless.

Oh what I wouldn't give for time to just stop right now.

Yeah, I was well aware that what I was doing was absolutely the worst, but this was the only thing I could think of after being driven completely into a corner.

Dai-sensei turned around, the cue ball still in her hand.



Gulp. I wasn't gulping at her pink panties... I was gulping at the thought of what awful, tragic things were going to happen from here on out.

“Ayumu... do you have any idea what you just did?! You damn Piero!”

“Stop making it sound like I'm a perverted circus performer!”

Haruna's leaping kick hit me square on the forehead.

“As expected from Aikawa! He can do things with a straight face that we wouldn't even dream about! That's just amazing! So gross!”

Just say whatever you want, dammit... for now, I wanted to quickly apologize to Dai-sensei, but...

“Ayumu-san. What did you... Rie-san, could we step outside for a moment?”

“I just don't know. This was all Ayumu's fault. Well, I guess I'll get over it if I don't see his idiot face for a week.”

The two masou shoujo were giving me strange looks. It didn't seem like they were disgusted or anything either... what was going on?

Dai-sensei slowly turned to face me.

“Ah, sorry. That was just...”

Dai-sensei's face was paralyzed into a smile. It was like she was a doll, whose face could only make that single expression.

“Ayumu-san...” Her voice was as high-pitched and lovely as always.

“Won't you join me outside for a minute~~?”

Despite her voice, her words made me feel like something very bad was about to happen to me.²⁴

²⁴Literally “her words were that of a delinquent,” but this has a very strange ring to it in English.

Chapter 2: Part 2

I rushed outside without remembering to put on my jacket. I was so sure that Dai-sensei was going to get really pissed at me and force me to bow to the floor.

I mean, as I trembled from the cold outside and stared at the twintailed girl in front of me, it's not like I could ask her to allow me to go back inside.

After all, I was completely to blame here.

It was seriously cold today.

“Ayumu-san~~.”

That same smile was still carved into her face. Even if it was a smile, the fact that her expression hadn't changed at all was terrifying.

Well, here it comes. She was going to lecture me. I took a deep breath and steeled myself. I was prepared to endure any attack she sent in my direction.

“Here I go~~.”

Suddenly... the world turned dark.

The two-lane road in front of the shop, the buildings all around us, the beautiful cloudy sky above us... everything was swallowed in darkness, and I found myself alone with Dai-sensei.

I really didn't even know what my feet were stepping on right now. I had been pulled completely into this strange, dark space.

“Well then~~, until you make me surrender, we're going to be in here forever~~.”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

“I'll only let strong people sexually harass me~~. Do you really think my pride would let me get caught off guard by someone weaker~~?”

“... I see. So it's like that.”

“So, Ayumu-san, please fight me here and win.”

... Seriously? How the hell had it come to this? I really had no idea what these masou shoujo were thinking. I mean, sure Haruna would always come and attack me when I sexually harassed her, but that would be the end of it.

``W-Wait just a bit! Let's stop this! You can punish me however you want! And... what do you mean `win'?"

``This battle will continue until you can land a hit on me. Doesn't that... seem like punishment~~?"

... Indeed, it seemed like a terrifying punishment.

``Ayumu-san's specialty is hand-to-hand fighting, yes~~?"

Saying that, Dai-sensei kicked off the black ground beneath our feet. I actually didn't know whether it was appropriate to call it a ``ground," but either way, I heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming at me.

I saw a flash of Dai-sensei's pale, silky skin, clear enough that I could almost see the veins running through her hand, as her fist gouged right into my stomach.

So fast! I couldn't make a single move of my own before her attack had landed.

I bent forwards at her attack, upon which she sent down a fierce strike at the back of my head with her elbow.

Haruna probably would've been satisfied with that and would've stopped there.

``Come now, if you don't fight back, you'll be here for your entire life, you know~~? Well, I won't kill you though."

This was hell. This was pure hell.

For now, I aimed for her head and sent out a light punch.

Dai-sensei grabbed my arm mid-attack. I heard a sharp snap, and saw that my wrist was now bent into a really weird direction.

``Ayumu-sann~~, you can heal yourself, can you not? I don't have to heal you myself, yes~~?"

Ahh, I see. She was going to break me and then fix me over and over again.

“By the way, I just wanted to ask...”

“Yes?”

“How long did it take the last guy who sexually harassed you to get out of here?”

“He landed a punch on me after a week~~.”

Seriously? He fought in this kind of place for an entire week?

“You're really not going to let me out until I hit you? Come on, we have to keep guard over Kyouko.”

“If Ayumu-san comes at me with all he has, then I'm sure it'll be over soon~~.”

.... I see. Okay, I got it. I had to try. It made me feel a bit bad to hit someone that I had just sexually harassed, but if she was asking for it, then I had no choice but to oblige her request.

This was also a good opportunity. Chris was probably around as strong as Dai-sensei, after all.

I was a zombie, so I didn't feel any pain, and my body recovered quickly. I had to take good advantage of those traits and pressure her.

Even if I was no match for her, it was important for me to keep attacking. That was something Dai-sensei had taught me before.

“I'm... going to fight seriously now, okay?”

“Okaaay~~.”

Dai-sensei happily nodded. I rushed right in front of her and thrust out my fist.

“Too slowww~~.”

Dai-sensei kicked her feet up and hit my fist. This gave her an opening to softly place her hand on my chest.

Boom. Something exploded.

Well, it's not like the explosion actually made a sound. Unfortunately, I still felt my heart rupturing inside my body.

Just by putting her hand on my chest... ugh, I might've been a zombie, but couldn't she ease up just a bit?

Someone more naïve might think that they had killed me and would've let down their guard... but that wasn't going to happen here.

“By the way, should I try to imitate Chris's fighting style for a bit~~?”

“... You can do that?”

“Well, they do call me ‘the strongest,’ after all~~.”

She chuckled. It was extremely cute, with her hand covering her mouth. But then... Dai-sensei blurred in front of my eyes.

The next moment, she had jammed her fingers into my Adam's apple. I opened my mouth in surprise... but this was my chance.

“Hah!”

She had gotten too close. At this distance, there was no way she could dodge my right hook.

My fist definitely dug right into Dai-sensei's soft cheek.

But... Dai-sensei just kept on smiling. Had my attack caused no damage?

I rushed right at her, but none of my attacks had any effect.

What the hell? I frowned, and immediately felt an attack land on the back of my head.

That attack sent me flying for thirty meters. There weren't any walls or other obstructions in the dark space, so I just kept on rolling and rolling.

“Don't let down your guard~~.”

I heard the pitter-patter of Dai-sensei's footsteps behind me. Hm? What

happened to the Dai-sensei I had punched a second ago? Ah, no, there she was, back where I had been sent flying. Wha-... there were two Dai-senseis?! What the hell?!

The Dai-sensei that had punched me suddenly vanished into smoke.

“This is magic that lets you split into two. That was just a double~~.”

A double. I see... there was also magic like that.

“But, I don't remember Chris using magic like that.”

“The doubles Chris makes are nothing more than dolls~~. She fights with lots and lots of them stacked up on her own body.”

“Why in the world would she want to-”

“She likes to control the battle~~. Everyone might say she's the strongest, but there are still lots of nasty attacks that she can't deal with. For example... Ayumu-san, say you send a really nice attack at her. You hit one of her doubles instead, and you end up thinking that your attack doesn't work~~. Now, a question! If punches don't work, what do you do?”

“If I can't punch her... I guess I'd try to judo hold her or something?”

“Yes, something like that~~. And so, one of your most effective attacks has been sealed~~”

Clap clap clap clap. Dai-sensei applauded me.

I see. That was the true nature of the invulnerable monster.

Now that I thought about it, it all made sense.

Even if she was cut or impaled by a sword, she didn't have a single wound to show for it... that was impossible.

If you get impaled by a sword, then at the very least your skin should break a bit.

So for her to escape that completely unwounded was completely impossible... or, in other words, the attack hadn't reached her in the first place.

“But, that isn't the real problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“It's just like the name sounds. Doubles magic lets you become two people~~. In Chris's case, she can make dozens and dozens of copies all at once~~. Then, she casts lots of illusions, and can even make them half-transparent~~.”

“Umm, sorry, but that was too technical. Come again?”

“In other wordsss... no matter how much you punch down her doubles, your attacks won't ever reach the real person~~.”

Ah, I see. Even if I push one double out of the way and try to attack the real person, there will still be dozens of doubles there waiting for me... geez, facing the strongest was no joke.

“Also, Ayumu-sann~~, you put too much power into your attacks. Try for a few more counterattacks~~”

“Counterattacks, huh...?”

“Yes yes. For example...”

Dai-sensei kicked off the black ground again. Her small fist soon appeared in front of my eyes. It was a straight punch with her right hand. I instantly dodged. She was just full of openings right now... I had my chance.

... Okay, time for a counterattack.

I thrust my fist out, trying to cross Dai-sensei's arm with my own, but before I could do that her other fist sunk right into my face.

“See that right now~~? I sent out a light attack, and then you tried to attack backkkk... but I used that chance to counter again and caught you off guard~~. When you're attacking, all your opponent is thinking about is guarding and dodging... you can't expect to do any damage. So you wait... and try to lure your opponent into attacking~~. When your opponent is attacking, they're not thinking about guarding at allll~~... all you have to do is find that timing to strike.”

“I see... I'll take that into account.”

I bent my broken nose back into place and readied my fists.

“Well nowww... try hard and land that single blow~~!!”

She gave me a brisk smile, looking like some fired-up baseball coach talking to his team.

Okay, first you send out a light attack...

I closed the distance between me and Dai-sensei, my left shoulder headed right for her. I launched a light jab, and she came back at me with her own attack...

Uwah! Her super-fast attack grazed my ear.

I twirled to the right to get out of the way, and taking advantage of that, launched a high kick right at Dai-sensei.

The heel of my sneakers connected with Dai-sensei's forehead.

“Eh?”

I... hit her?

“If I hadn't used a double there, this fight would already be over~~. How unfortunate. But... I am somewhat surprised.”

Dammit. I had hit a double.

My shoulders drooped, but Dai-sensei spoke to me with joy in her voice.

“That speed back there... even I couldn't follow it~~.”

Seriously? Hm? Wait... I see!

“Can I try again?”

“Please please, go ahead~~.”

I did almost the same thing; I went at her from my left side, and then sent a jab out with my right fist. Dai-sensei countered. Maybe she caught on to what I was trying to do, but she sent back almost the same exact attack as before.

I dodged her attack, and then sent a straight punch with my right hand sailing

for Dai-sensei's face.

I stopped my fist, though, millimeters before the attack reached her nose.

“My my, but you could've ended it right there~~.”

As I thought. The time it usually took for me to intensify my physical strength had been shortened. Hell, my attacks may have also breached the 600% limit they used to have.

Usually, I would have to attack after accumulating my strength.

To make a baseball analogy, it was like telling your opponent that you were about to throw him a 150 km/hr fastball.

But, this was different. In an instant, I could feel my strength explode, to the point where it completely disoriented my senses.

It was like planning on throwing a 10 km/hr pitch, but suddenly throwing a 150 km/hr fastball.

... I had certainly grown strong.

“Ayumu-san seems to be doing much better than expected, so I'm going to get serious now too, `kayy~~?”

“Sure! I'd ask for nothing less!”

I wanted to practice what I had learned just now over and over again, to the point where everything had completely sunk in. Thus, I responded like that and gave her a smile.

Dai-sensei took out a cheap-looking Japanese katana, and...

“Nomobuyo, woshi, hashitawa, dokeda, gunmiicha, dei, ribura!”

Noooooo! Anything but thaaaaaaaaaaaaatttttt!!!

Bonus Project 1 1

Orito: Everyone! Do you like billiards?!

Guys: Yaaay~~!

Orito: And I mean that in a sexual way, of course!

Guys: Of course~~!!!

Orito: Fuhahaha! Aren't you glad you came?! This end-of-the-year party is splendid, isn't it?! Everyone, worship me!

Guys: This is the best! Orito-sama! The God of ero! Orito-sama!

Ayumu: ... It's like there's some kind of religion being born here. Well, everyone's having a good time, so it's fine.

Orito: What's wrong, Aikawa? You're the only one who's not getting into it. Aren't you enjoying yourself? It's a party!

Ayumu: Not really. If I wanted to talk to girls, I could just do that back at the classroom.

Orito: Listen here, Ayumu. The kanji for "happy" is written as "women enjoying themselves."

Ayumu: ... Are you sure you got your kanji right there?

Orito: If we provide an atmosphere that girls can enjoy, then feelings of happiness will abound!

Ayumu: Well, certainly, watching them play billiards and smiling like that makes me feel pretty glad.

Orito: Aikawa, come here for a second. Here, from right here...

Ayumu: W-What?! That girl's stooped down and her breasts... I can see them so clearly!

Orito: Let me ask you again. Aren't you enjoying yourself? It's a party!

Ayumu: This is the best!
Orito-sama! The God of ero!
Orito-sama!

Is This a
Bonus?



Long Live Orito-sama!





She was a tough opponent. To think I would meet such a worthy Go opponent at a place like this.

Mixers are wonderful places if you can meet such people there. My next opponent is Haruna's homeroom teacher. People have said that you should give up the minute you meet her. Uhm...

She's strong. Of the ones I've met so far, she's the toughest opponent up to date.

But... I can't lose. I don't want to lose to anyone.

If it's for Ayumu's sake... three liters wouldn't be a problem.

Chapter 3 - If a Girl's Cleavage; is Bigger Than an F Cup; it's Worth it to Marry... Oops, Too Many Syllables: Part 1

That was hell. That was the very definition of hell. But the important word is ``was."

But wow, was Dai-sensei a good teacher. I managed to land a hit a bit after an hour in that void.

In the end, I couldn't touch Dai-sensei at all after she had transformed into a masou shoujo, but I did successfully hit her after she dispelled her transformation.

What I had learned should work on Chris too. It was really hard, but I was happy beyond belief.

I was insanely tired though, and I slowly hobbled back to the darts bar.

``Ah, welcome back Aikawa-san. That was fast."

Kyouko greeted me with her angelic smile.

``Hueh? Ah, you're right. I bet he cheated."

These two seemed to know that whoever sexually harassed Dai-sensei would be dragged into a trial of strength.

``Anderson-kun."

``What's up? You really look pretty beaten up there..."

``I take back what I had said before. Dai-sensei is... terrifying."

``Hoo hoo." The owl agreed with my statement.

``Hey, Aikawa-san."

Kyouko was waving me over, so I dragged my tired body over to her.

``Aikawa-san, Aikawa-san... at this rate, why don't we just put Ariel-sensei to sleep?"

``Eh? We can do that?"

Kyouko glanced over at Dai-sensei and nodded. Dai-sensei was chatting with Haruna as if nothing had happened. They were probably talking about how I had managed to land a punch during my trial.

... Yeah, that sounded good. I had only sexually harassed Dai-sensei back there because I didn't know how to keep her in check otherwise.

``How do we do that?"

``Ah, looks like you're interested. All we have to do is to get her to drink a lot of carbonated drinks."

Carbonated? I frowned deeply. Kyouko chuckled at my expression and continued.

``Actually, Ariel-sensei gets quite drunk if she drinks carbonated things, and she falls asleep pretty quickly after that. However, I'm sure she would be suspicious if I offered a drink to her, and I doubt I could convince her to drink it, so..."

``I got it... leave it to me."

I passed by Kyouko. Half a year ago, I would've called you crazy if you told me I'd be coming up with battle strategies with Kyouko someday.

First, Kyouko deliberately lost in a game of billiards.

``Ahh, it's been so long that I've gotten pretty rusty. Could someone teach me how to play again?"

Kyouko was trying to get all the people gathered around Dai-sensei to flock around herself instead. Of course, even billiard beginners would jump at the opportunity to teach Kyouko if it meant they would be able to touch that body of hers. Like that, Kyouko disappeared into a throng of people who had been crowded around Dai-sensei. Meanwhile, I headed over to the tables.

Ahh... someone was calling me again. I took out my cell phone, which had suddenly started vibrating.

This time, I made sure to properly check the display. It was from Saras. Okay...

``Ah, hello. Saras?"

“My darling. Will you be much longer?”

... Her words made me realize something and I checked my phone. It was 5:03PM. Crap. Sara's live performance had already started.

“Sorry! I'm really sorry!”

“Actually, the performance schedule has changed. Can you make it by six?”

“Ahh, I'll definitely come! Please wait for me.”

“Okay! ... Understood. I will wait for you.”

Saras sounded truly happy on the other line, and for some reason I felt pain shoot through my heart. I really had to quickly put Dai-sensei to sleep and make sure she didn't do anything strange anymore.

The problem was how I was going to get her to drink something carbonated.

“... Check... how's that?”

Hiramatsu made her move with confidence. But... Yuu countered almost instantly.

“Ah... that's not good... I see... you wanted me to attack you, didn't you?”

Even though she had just lost, Hiramatsu had a full smile on her face, and looked truly refreshed. She looked like she was genuinely having fun, from the bottom of her heart. It wasn't an expression I was used to seeing from her.

“Yuu, sorry to butt in when you're in the middle of something, but I need to ask you for a favor.”

I told Yuu about the situation, and asked for her help. We both took a glass of some kind of carbonated drink and pressed on Dai-sensei's location.

“Dai-sensei, are you thirsty? Need a drink?”

I spoke up to her with a bright zombie smile on my face.

Dai-sensei was just on her way back to the tables, still spinning her cue stick like a baton.

“My myyy~~. I was just thinking about how I wanted something to drink~~.”

Dai-sensei had the same carefree tone as always as she pointed her pretty, pure eyes at me. I felt a bit awkward tricking her like this, but there was no time to be worried about things like that.

“Umm, this is the most popular drink in this world.”

I said that and handed out some cola to her. Most popular... yeah, I really didn't know about that, but...

“This is carbonated, yes~~? I'm not too fond of carbonated drinks...”

Not surprising. She probably knew that she got drunk off carbonated drinks, so she wouldn't try to drink any.

But then, Yuu brought over some ginger ale.

This is a drink made from ginger.

Lightning seemed to run down Dai-sensei's spine.

“Ginger... you mean, that topping they put on tofu...?!”

There it was! Dai-sensei was really weak when it came to all matters concerning tofu. I could see her looking at the ginger ale now like it was a juicy piece of wagyu beef.

“Yup. This is a ginger drink.”

If we wanted to win, we had to push hard here.

“That's really really interesting~~... but can you really drink something like that?”

“Just try a little bit! Just a little. A small, teensy weensy bit!”

“Hmm... only a little then...”

Alright! Dai-sensei still looked reluctant but she took one swig of the ginger ale.

“Fukyunn~~.”

Eh? What was that cute sound just now? I watched as Dai-sensei's cheeks began to flush red.

Everyone, please be careful not to get tricked by the words ``just a little." Those words will never ever be what they seem, no matter where you hear them.

``This is quite tastyyy~~..."

Gulp, gulp, gulp... it was like a dam had broken after the first mouthful. Dai-sensei quickly polished off the rest of the glass.

``Puhyahh... *hic*."

She was seriously drunk! I could see the alcohol... or I guess, the carboxylic acid in this case... just running through her system! Geez, that was fast!

But, this was a good opportunity. We had to use this chance and get her to drink more.

I made eye contact with Yuu and nodded. She went to the counter and came back with a ton of carbonated drinks.

``Come on, drink some more, drink some more!"

I sat next to Dai-sensei and refilled her glass. Yuu had brought over a lot of bottled drinks.

``My my~~. Should I really~~?"

Dai-sensei was presented with glass after glass of fizzy drinks. And she drank each and every one of them clean.

``Okay, let's keep going!"

Yuu and I were starting to enjoy seeing Dai-sensei drink like that. Not to be outdone, we also followed her and drank lots of cola.

Let's see who can drink faster.

``A contest, hmm~~? Fufu... I definitely won't lose~~."

Nice one, Yuu. Now we could naturally get Dai-sensei to drink a lot more.

“Okay, let's drink on three then.”

Yuu, Dai-sensei, and I all readied our cups filled with cola.

“One, two... three!”

Gulp... gulp... thud. The first person to set her cup down was Yuu.

That was way too fast! This was cola, you know?! Dai-sensei was the next one to finish, and she chuckled, holding out her glass.

“Let's go againnn~.”

I filled Dai-sensei's cup to the brim with ginger ale as she and Yuu had a glaring contest. Meanwhile, I poured cola in my own glass. I should be able to beat them with cola.

“One, two... three!”

Gulp... gulp... thud. Thud.

This time, Yuu and Dai-sensei put down their glasses together. Were their throats made of rubber or something?!

Who won?

“Ayumu-saaan, who won that one~~?”

Yuu, you really are trying hard right now. You're trying to get her to drink lots with this strategy of yours, aren't you?

“It was a draw. Let's try again!”

Like this, we had many more drinking contests.

Through it all, Dai-sensei was getting more and more into it, when...

“Ayumu-saaan~~.”

She called my name with a sweet voice. What the hell was this erotic-sounding voice coming from her small body?

“Let's kiss~~.”

“Hyoehh?” I stiffened at her sudden proposition.

Her two pigtails touched me on the shoulder, and her face quickly drew near mine.

“Mmmmm...” Her small, soft, pink lips came at me.

“Hey, Dai-sensei?! Sto-”

“Ufufu, Ayumu-san is so shy~~. How cute~~... mmmm...”

Did this girl turn into a kiss demon or something when she got drunk?! Hurry up... hurry up and fall asleep, dammit! If we ended up having to fight in that dark space again... I mean, this was just way too much for my soul to handle! This wasn't my zombie soul I was talking about... I could feel the ounce of human logic I still had just getting blown away. I braced myself and prepared to get pushed to the floor and to have my chastity stolen away from me, but at that moment Yuu came over with a mountain of mugs.

Were those... all filled with ginger ale?

Another match.

Yuu was still emotionless, but I could spy a bit of seriousness in her eyes. She forcibly peeled Dai-sensei's body off mine.

“Okaaayy~~. I won't lose this time. They call me the strongest for a reasonnnn~~.”

I was saved... I guess? I felt a bit relieved and depressed at the same time, but managed to totter unsteadily away and escape.

The party was in full swing. Many groups had formed around the bar and they all seemed to be having a great time.

“... That's... thanks but... I'm not... I'm not that cute...”

“No no, Hiramatsu-san is seriously cute! Come on, have a bit more confidence in yourself! Have a bit more passion!”

Hiramatsu was taking a short break after enjoying her shogi session with Yuu, but now seemed to have been surrounded by an overly-excited guy. She had a troubled look on her face.

“Ahh, yeah yeah. We got it, we got it.”

Mihara also seemed to be acting as her bodyguard, and quickly dealt with the guy.

“Ahh, this is really impossible. The eighth time is already just awful.”

“Right? It's definitely impossible. It's common knowledge.”

Kyouko was laughing together with some guys. When I saw they were fiddling with a piece of paper, I guessed that they were trying to test the trivia that you could only fold a piece of paper in half up to eight times.

“Come on, bend over a bit more. You have a great butt, so there's nothing to be embarrassed about.”

“Haha, I don't wanna. Hahaha...”

Anderson-kun was teaching some girl how to play billiards. Hm? He was sexually harassing the girl, but for some reason they seemed to be having a good time. Ugh, people with good looks were just so...

Either way, it felt difficult to butt into any of these groups.

I then saw Haruna in the corner. However, there was nobody next to her, but she was just there alone talking to the owl.

She's been there talking to the owl all this time, hasn't she?

“You know the saying ‘the scales fell from my eyes’?²⁵ That's when someone is so surprised their contact lenses fall out, and everyone else stops and tries to help you, right?”

“Hoo hoo. Hookay.”

Hm? Were they actually talking? The owl was nodding as if impressed by something.

“Butterflies taste with their feet, you know! So I'm sure I'll be able to do that someday too!”

“Hoo hoo. Oohh?”

²⁵A Japanese idiom that translates to “becoming enlightened.”

They were talking, weren't they? That owl had just said ``okay" back to Haruna a few minutes ago, hadn't she?

Haruna's ahoge bounced happily back and forth. At that moment, a guy carrying a drink passed by Haruna, so she took that chance to speak up to him.

``Hey hey! I heard that the 'Forty-Eight Prefectures of Japan' is the name of an assassin with forty-eight different abilities!"²⁶

``Ah, okay..."

The guy really didn't know how to respond, so he just slipped past and headed for Mihara. Haruna seemed a bit unhappy after that, but...

``Hoo hoo..."

The owl seemed to sympathize with Haruna, and Haruna cheered up right away.

``Yeah, right? You think so too ,right?"

``Hoo hoo."

I see. Everything Haruna talked about was way too strange for anybody else to follow, so she ended up alone and just talking with the owl for all this time.

Haruna should've just talked about normal things... why did she go out of her way to find really obscure things to talk about? Maybe she just really wanted to make new friends at this mixer...

So she would desperately try to find things to talk about, and then fail. Idiot...

Just ask normally, dammit. Haruna might've always acted in crazy ways, but I'm sure anybody would smile if they saw her enjoying herself like that.

But, she had come today to make friends.

She was trying to control herself from acting in her usual way, and came here in search of fun conversations.

I sat next to Haruna.

²⁶To my knowledge, there are only 47 prefectures.

“What do you want, Ayumu? Go off over there somewhere!”

“Did you make any?”

“Hueh?”

“A boyfriend... or some friends.”

“... I don't need any of those.”

Haruna sharply turned her back on me.

I took Haruna by the hand and stood up.

“What are you doing?! You damn pervert! You erol chocolate!”²⁷

I left the owl behind and tugged Haruna by the arm.

“I wanted to get in with one of these groups here, but I don't think I can by myself. So I need to use a super pretty girl like Haruna.”

“WWha?! Well, Ayumu is seriously gross... so I guess that can't be helped.”

First, we went towards Hiramatsu, who was pretty nearby.

“Hey hey, you free this Sunday? You're really cute. Seriously cute.”

Mihara wasn't around anymore to protect Hiramatsu, so some tough-looking guy was now really aggressively pressuring Hiramatsu into a corner.

“.... Ummm... sorry... umm...”

Before I could say something, Haruna sent a flying kick right into the guy.

Alright, Haruna, go and tell him off. Just look at how much he's bothering Hiramatsu.

“I'm cuter, right?! Say that to me!”

That was her complaint...? The guy held the back of his head, where Haruna had just kicked him, and just ran off without saying anything.

²⁷Reference to Tirol Chocolate, a Japanese chocolate brand.

Geez, I'd have expected such a tough-looking guy to at least be able to say something back. What a paper tiger...

“Sorry...” As I watched his large back grow smaller in the distance, I apologized in Haruna's place.

“Aikawa-kun... thank you... you saved me.”

Hiramatsu looked up at me and smiled. Haruna wasted no time to smack her on the forehead.

“If you don't like something, just say it already! If that had been Ayumu back there, you'd already be pregnant by now!”

What kind of unprincipled person did they think I was? I'm not Orito, dammit.

“Sorry, Hiramatsu. This girl doesn't mean anything bad by it.”

I felt just really bad at this point, so I moved towards the next group.

“Oh? Tae-chan, you managed to beat him back? Nice one.”

I saw that Mihara had returned to her seat by Hiramatsu, so I don't think any weird guys would try to flirt with her anymore.

Well, Orito was also with Mihara... granted, they were always together, so this was still probably fine. Honestly, if Haruna hadn't smacked Hiramatsu, I would've wanted to go back and join them.

But, for now, I had to find a group that Haruna could have fun in. Let's try some other places...

The next closest group to us was Kyouko's group. It was the largest group and seemed the most lively, so it was hard to try and get in there, but...

“Hey hey.” Haruna didn't even hesitate before going in. You could almost say she had no tact...

“What is it~~?”

Even if Haruna had just randomly butted in, Kyouko was in her cute-and-innocent mode, so she responded with a smile.

“How did you get those breasts so pointlessly big? They fake or something?”

I could see Kyouko's smile crumbling before my very eyes.

“Ahh. I love mayo! I've spent my entire life just eating lots of cabbage and mayo. Maybe it's because of that?”

“Maybe it was all the cabbage instead, right?”

Kyouko had spoken up to the people around her. Like that, she could use this conversation as a jumping off point for everyone in the group to enjoy.

“You want to dress up like Kawasaki Mayo?”²⁸

She confused it with something completely different!²⁹

“Haruna, no. Not that kind of mayo.”

“Huh? I don't get it.”

“Aikawa-senpai. Are you sure Rie-san is doing okay?”

I could feel a “get the hell out of here” aura coming from Kyouko's words, so I sighed and took Haruna by the arm.

“Hey! Ayumu! I still haven't heard the secret from big-breasts over here! Ukyaaahh!!”

I dragged Haruna away, and headed next to Yuu and Dai-sensei.

“Buhyaahh~~!! One more cup!”

I will not lose.

They were stuck in their own little world. Good, good. Like this, I doubt any random guys would come and try to butt in.

Also, this was a world I had run away from in the first place. There's no way I was going back.

²⁸A J-drama actor.

²⁹Uhh, where do I start. “I love Mayo” here was said “mayora-,” which is a play on words for “mayo love.” In the 20th century there was also a term called “Amura-,” which refers to people who were huge fans of Namie Amuro and dressed like her. So the literal translation of this exchange would go something like “Mayora-” “You want to dress like Kawasaki Mayo?” “She confused that with Amura- or something!” Clearly not very translatable.

So... that meant Anderson-kun was the only option left.

“Ah, that's good. Now, hit the cue ball here on the cushion, and let's go for a two-bounce shot...”

“Okaaay.”

He was in the middle of a lesson. I picked up a cue stick and handed it to Haruna.

“Anderson-kun, could you teach Haruna how to play billiards properly?”

“Ah, okay.”

“Ehh, but I was next...”

“Sorry. We need Aikawa on the basketball team, so I gotta do him this favor.”

I'm definitely not joining that team, you know?

“Okay, let's get to it then. First, your form.”

Anderson-kun touched Haruna's shoulder. And in the next instant, Haruna had started whacking Anderson-kun repeatedly with her cue stick, in the style of a Shaolin monk.

“You damn pervert! Ayumu! This guy is definitely trying to touch my Unlimited Breast Works !”

... This wasn't going to work.

In the end, Haruna and I ended up going back to the corner where the owl was sitting.

Was there really nobody here that could get along with Haruna?

Haruna seemed exhausted as she collapsed into her chair, and let out a sigh.

“Ok, I know what Ayumu was trying to do there now. He was trying to train me like a monkey and make a business out of it, wasn't he?”

“What kind of masochistic businessman would actually be able to make money off that?! I was just trying to make you a few friends.”

``Friends..."

I don't need them.

Is what she was about to say, right? But she didn't say it.

After all, I believed that Haruna really *did* want to make friends.

``Hoo." The owl raised up a wing.

``What are you doing?"

``Hoo." The owl pointed her raised wing towards Haruna.

``Ahh, that's her way of showing friendship. She thinks that high fives are a way to say `let's be friends.'"

Anderson-kun came over with a smile and explained.

``Hoo hoo." Come on, hurry up and high five me.

I could feel that the owl was saying something like that, but...

``I don't need any friends! You're more like one of my henchmen!"

What was she sulking about all of a sudden? Haruna sharply turned to face the other way.

Geez, stop trying to act so tough.

I went up to Anderson-kun and whispered in his ear.

``Sorry, but could you maybe try to organize something that Haruna would be good at? ... You know, like some sports or something."

``Well, we already tried billiards... I guess there's just darts left."

``Hm, darts? That's... probably a good idea. I think Haruna would like that. Could you start a darts tournament?"

``... Sure, why not. I wanted to play some darts anyways."

Anderson-kun gave me a thumbs up, and quickly went over to the counter to make preparations with the shop employee there.

Haruna was still sulking, and didn't even try to talk to anybody.

Maybe I shouldn't have taken her around the room like that? I scratched my head and searched for something to say to Haruna.

A certain someone caught sight of us like that and came on over.

-

“If a girl's cleavage; is bigger than an F cup; it's worth it to marry... oops, too many syllables.”

-

Orito smiled and said that without any hint of embarrassment in his voice. God, he was annoying, looking so proud of his spiky-haired head like that.

“Uwaah, that's gross. What the hell was that supposed to be?”

“... Ooo... do you think... anybody would ever want to marry me...?”

Mihara and Hiramatsu both came over with their drinks in one hand.

“What's that? Some weird song...?”

“It's called a haiku. It has a rhythm of five syllables, then seven syllables, then five syllables again.”

“But then yours was just wrong.”

“It's all about the rhythm! Haruna, wanna try?”

“... She is an angel; This great girl Haruna-chan; She is a genius.”

Haruna was still sulking, and just randomly threw that haiku out.

“Which one do you want? Do you want to be an angel or a genius?!”

I retorted like that, but Hiramatsu backed Haruna up.

“Maybe... she wants to write the word with the kanji for ‘genius’... but pronounce it as ‘angel’?”

“Hoo, hoo, makes sense, hoo.”

This owl definitely can talk. I heard it with my own ears.

“They both have to do with sky, after all... pretty amazing.”³⁰

Eh? That haiku was amazing? Maybe Mihara's head just was funny from hanging around too much with Tomonori? They did often say that if you hang out with idiots, you'd eventually become one yourself.

“As expected from Haruna-chan. But, there are ‘seasonal words’ for haiku, right? You have to use some seasonal words.”

Orito pushed his glasses up and proudly said that.

“Well, you didn't have any of those in yours either.”

Mihara shook her head at the ridiculousness of it all.

-

“I think ‘marry’ is a seasonal word for June. In the changing room; bathing suit, just dive right in; the sound of water.”

-

“What the hell are you doing in that middle line?!”

“Only Orito-kun...”

Mihara grabbed Orito's nose, her own face flushing red, as Hiramatsu followed up with a slightly shy expression. I actually found that verse quite amazing. Closing my eyes, I could just imagine Orito trying to steal underwear in a changing room...

Haruna thought for a little bit...

-

“It's now eight o'clock; let's get the gang together; but today, that's just...”

-

³⁰Genius is written as “tensai,” where the “ten” is the kanji for sky.

“That's really sad! You don't have to get *everyone* together!”³¹

“Umm... remember the seasonal words...”

“The season is the 1970s!”

“Hoo.” The owl earnestly nodded, as if voicing her approval of the 1970s.

“Wow, I never thought of that! As expected from Haruna-chan. I admit defeat.”

I admit defeat. Haruna probably liked hearing those words more than anybody else in the world, and I saw her perk right back up.

“Nyahahaha! You're a millennium too early if you want to win against me!”

Haruna was so simple that her emotions were like rolls of the dice. You could think you rolled a one but the next second you saw that you had actually rolled a six. It almost made you feel bad for worrying about her.

“Is there no brave man here who can defeat Haruna-chan?!”

Orito banged his fist onto the desk in frustration.

“Ah, I think Mojimoji-kun over there has a pretty good sense when it comes to words.”

Mihara pointed towards Kyouko's group. Eh? Since when had she started calling Kyouko “Mojimoji-kun”?

“Hmph. It doesn't matter who it is! Nobody's a match for me!”

Haruna crossed her arms, her ahoge moving back and forth like windshield wipers.

Orito and Mihara both chuckled at seeing how much fun Haruna was having.

“Ah, I'll go and call her over.”

Saying that, Mihara stood up and ran over to where Kyouko's group was.

³¹A reference to a 1970s comedy show, whose title roughly translates to “It's Eight O'Clock! Let's Get the Gang Together.” I'm assuming the reason it's “sad” is because some of the original cast members have passed away, but I'm not sure. Also, this show is way too old for any of these characters (who are supposedly in high school) to really care...

“I see. You all...”

Before I could say anything, Hiramatsu put a finger up to her lips and shushed me. After that, she glanced over to Haruna, who was still in high spirits.

As I thought. They had realized that Haruna was all alone, and made up this ridiculous haiku battle to try and get her to be a bit more sociable.

“Aikawa~~, look a bit more cheerful!”

Orito had thrown his arms around my shoulders. His spiky hair was poking into my chin... that's seriously gross.

But, he was right. I should liven up a bit too. Okay then...

“Hiramatsu~~.”

Pretending like I was being pushed over by Orito, I also wrapped my arms around Hiramatsu's shoulders and hugged her.

“...?! Eh? Ah... umm...”

“What are you doing, you perv?! You damn Erogu!”

Haruna rained kicks down on me as I regretted doing something inappropriate again.

“Sorry, Hiramatsu.”

“Eh? ... It's fine... I was just... a bit surprised.”

Ahh, what a good girl.

Was she really happy being friends with these people?

... Was I friends with these people, anyways?

Actually, what made two people friends? “Oh, hi, let's be friends.” “Okay.” And then you're officially friends?

“Hey, Haruna.”

“What do you want, pervert?! You stupid fool! Ayumu!”

It's almost like she was trying to get my name to rhyme with ``fool"...

``I'm not trying to be deep or anything, but I just had a question... what exactly makes two people friends?"

``That's... oh, right! They say that birds of a feather are friends, right?! So if you meet people who have the same way of looking at things, then you're friends!"

Actually, the idiom was ``birds of a feather flock together," and it referred to how similar people tend to gather together... like how stands are supposed to attract other stands...³² but I couldn't bring myself to correct her.

I see... birds of a feather were friends.

That might've been one correct answer to my question.

``So... doesn't that mean that owl over there is already Haruna's friend?"

Orito pointed that out, and Haruna glanced at the owl.

Haruna and the owl locked gazes, both their eyes as big as a cat's. But then, Haruna looked away.

``..... I guess. Maybe."

Haruna opened her mouth only slightly when she said that, and her words were barely audible. Her ahoge shyly twisted into a loop, as if it were a pig's tail.

``Hoo hoo." *That's right, that's right!* the owl seemed to be saying as it nodded. The owl raised its wing again.

She was inviting Haruna to high five her again, as a sign of friendship. And this time, Haruna...

``Shut up! I'm definitely not gonna do something that embarrassing!"

She wanted to make friends. But, for some reason she was embarrassed.

Orito and I laughed loudly at seeing Haruna looking so lost because of that.

³²A reference to Jojo's Bizarre Adventure.

Chapter 3: Part 2

I hadn't gotten a chance to use the toilet back at the vampire ninja party, and I had eaten a bit too much pizza that was completely doused in Tabasco, so I took a rather long bathroom break when the darts bar party reached its peak in activity.

I was the one who suggested this mixer in the first place, so to think that everyone'd get so into it only when I was gone... oh well, whatever.

Back at the billiards table, all the girls were still going crazy over how good Anderson-kun was, but now both the girls and the guys were making lots of noise.

Past the counter and next to the tables were a bunch of dart machines. Everyone was surrounding those machines in a half circle.

Dai-sensei was fast asleep on the sofa next to the billiards tables.

Now, I didn't know much about darts, so I couldn't really say what was going on right now, but I was pretty sure you're not supposed to play darts blindfolded.

However, I saw Haruna there, getting ready to throw a dart with a blindfold on.

``What's going on here?"

I saw Orito in the middle of the crowd, so I decided to walk up to him and try to get a grasp of the situation.

``Haruna-chan and Anderson are both way too good, so for two out of three throws they decided to go blindfolded."

Hmm... as usual, Haruna was really good at games like this.

Umm, according to the score, Anderson-kun had eighty points, while Haruna had seventy-two? Hm, maybe it was her blindfold, but she didn't seem to have many points at all.

``Bloody Scryed!"

Haruna let out a strange shout and took a strange pose as she threw her next shot. I heard a strange *whoosh*, before the dart hit the board a bit above center. It had hit where there was a small circular pattern on the board.

Ahh, too bad.

“She got it! Triple twenty! Wow, she's really gotten the hang of this, hasn't she?”

I had no idea why everyone was getting so excited, considering she hadn't even hit the center, but...

Haruna threw her second blindfolded dart. She didn't really seem to even be aiming, and the dart flew towards the outside of the board.

Haruna missed? It looked like she had done that on purpose, but... oh well, too bad.

“Now to end it!”

Her third throw. Haruna took off her blindfold, and I completely expected her to hit the board dead center, but the dart she threw just barely hit the board, landing on the six.

Just six points? Wow, that's kinda shabby... is what I thought, but...

“Uwaaaaahhh!!!”

Ear-piercing cheers roared around me, and I could almost feel the air shaking.

“I lost. As expected from Haruna-sensei.”

Anderson-kun put on a resigned smile and held out his hand towards Haruna.

“You're a hundred eras too early to think that you can take me on!”

Eh? What happened? Haruna won?

I didn't know the rules for darts, so I seemed to be the only person who didn't know what was going on.

“Haruna won? Her second shot completely missed.”

“Ahh, so you don't know. She hit the triple twenty, missed the second shot on purpose, and then hit the double six on the third. That makes exactly seventy-two.”

I see. The outer ring gave double points, didn't it? And Haruna had made seventy-two points. In other words, when playing darts you wanted your score to go down.

“Okay, I guess that means Haruna-sensei is the winn-”

“Wait just a second! Aikawa's here now.”

Orito took my hand and raised it. It's not like I really wanted to play, so all I could do was scratch myself awkwardly on the chin.

“Eh?”

“Ah, right, Aikawa hasn't tried yet, has he?”

Mihara, who was standing next to Anderson-kun, blinked a few times in surprise.

“Okay then. The last match will be Haruna-sensei versus Aikawa.”

Anderson-kun said that and then called me forward to the dartboard. I heard applause around me, and felt that I couldn't really refuse at this point. I walked up and was handed three darts. I held one of them like I would hold a pencil. It was heavier than I had expected. I keeping it up, I tried aiming for the dartboard.

My first darts game... I should hold back my strength a bit and just toss the darts lightly, right...?

“We'll play a game of 501.”

“501?”

“The first person to bring their score cleanly to zero wins.”

I see. Those must've been the rules Haruna was playing by last game. I had thought darts was just a game where you tried to get the most points...

“You have to hit a double on your last throw, so be careful.”

... What did that mean?

“Okay, here I go... hyaahh! Scarlet Needle!”

Haruna put on her blindfold and tossed the dart. Maybe it really was the blindfold, but she didn't hit the bullseye. Rather, her dart hit above it, around the twenty-point region.

“Is there any point to the blindfold?!”

The audience stood there in shock.

All three of her darts landed in the same place.

Could it be... that she could get more points by throwing the darts there?

“How many points do you get for hitting the center?”

“The center is fifty points, and the circle around that is twenty-five.”

I see. That's why they had those two circles there.

Asking about the rules, I found out that if you hit the circular bits towards the outside of the board, you could get double or triple points.

So, Haruna was hitting triple twenties, which gave her more points than the bullseye. It turned out that the point of darts wasn't to hit the center every time.

What's more, you couldn't just keep on getting triple twenties. Your last throw had to land on a double, or else you wouldn't win.

Either way, I also aimed a bit above center in order to hit the triple twenty.

My first throw... the dart doesn't stick.

My second throw... the dart doesn't stick.

My third throw... five points.

Why the hell were the five and the one on either side of the twenty point region?! I couldn't hit the twenty at all!

Eh, Haruna got a hundred and eighty points, and I only got five...?

This match was a slaughter! Also, Haruna once again hit three triple twenties without breaking a sweat.

I wouldn't let her win that easily...

My first throw... the dart doesn't stick.

My second throw... zero points.

My third throw... the dart doesn't stick.

The sound of boisterous laughter rang out all around me. So this was what it felt like to be forsaken by everyone...

“It's okay. Actually, this is quite impressive.”

Kyouko showed me a cute guts pose.

... It really seemed like I had zero talent for darts. Also, who the hell could throw the dart right into that tiny circle anyways?!

Maybe there was something wrong with my darts? Why weren't they even sticking? They should be able to stick at least, right? Ugh, this was so embarrassing.

On the other hand, Haruna got another blindfolded triple twenty. And then a triple nineteen. And then...

“Hiiiiyaaaaaaaaaahhhh~~!!”

Game over. And the cheers began.

“She won in nine darts! I've never seen that before! She did it blindfolded, too... this must be a miracle.”

Even the shop attendant seemed surprised.

“Amazing! That ahoge girl is amazing!”

As expected, Haruna had performed wonderfully, and now everyone began to look at her in a different light.

“Eh? The game's over? I guess Haruna did really well?”

“Yeah. To put it in bowling terms, it's like she scored a three hundred.”

That's pretty impressive. Well, more importantly, Haruna was really cute when she was having fun like this. Everyone else probably thought the same thing. There were even people who went up to her to beg for lessons.

“Hmm, maybe I should teach you how to play.”

Kyouko smiled and took me by the hand.

Yeah, that's a good idea. That was my first time playing darts, and I think Haruna was fine on her own now. I couldn't let this experience end so pathetically...

We walked over to an unused dartboard in the corner, and Kyouko came in close.

“Use your elbow like a pivot, like this...”

Her hand touched mine. I heard her sweet voice coming from just next to my ear, and her large breasts sometimes brushed my skin. Considering the situation, I really couldn't concentrate on the darts.

“... Aikawa-san, are you listening to me?”

I couldn't. Even if she taught me like this, I wouldn't get any better. At that point, Yuu and Anderson-kun walked over. Ahh, thank goodness.

Try to aim for the fourteen.

That was Yuu's advice. I wondered why that would be a good idea, but Anderson-kun supplied the details.

“The five and the one are next to the twenty, but you have the nine and the eleven next to the fourteen. Plus, theory says that beginners tend to aim left.”

I see. Certainly, my dart had missed the twenty and hit the five.

Alright... I'll aim for the fourteen... okay, I missed again. The dart wouldn't stick.

“This is the first time I've seen someone with such a disastrously low level of skill.”

Kyouko burst out laughing, and sent me a teasing smile.

I tried again... and hit my target!

“You're too unstable. Line yourself up with your throwing path and put weight on your pivot leg. Only use the part of your arm above your elbow to throw.”

While saying that, Kyouko took the dart from the board and gave me a demonstration.

When I watched her form, though, I couldn't see anything but her softly waving breasts. She really had huge breasts...

I did as I was told and tossed the dart as I was shown... and hm, nothing changed.

“It's important to throw with the same form each time. Before you aim for anywhere specific, try to practice so that you can throw the dart into the same spot reliably.”

Anderson-kun took me by the shoulders and the elbow. For some reason, I felt my heart speed up at his soft, gentle touch.

Ah, this was bad. What were these feelings? My heart was racing. Did the girls back there also feel this way? I'm not surprised they fell head over heels for him.

I looked up at Anderson-kun's face, which was handsome enough to belong to an English prince.

He was so cool. His features were chiseled. I felt like I was staring at the statue of David.

... Was I an idiot? What was I getting so dazed for? That was close. Okay, deep breath... I'm okay now. I'm a zombie, yeah. I'm not going to start walking down that road.

Then, Yuu pushed Anderson-kun away. Maybe she wanted to be the one to teach me?

Anderson-kun looked a bit puzzled as Yuu's two gauntleted hands firmly pushed his body from behind, shoving him away from me.

I will teach him.

Yuu's face was expressionless, but I could tell she was a bit excited.

“Yuu, you're...”

Could it be she was jealous of Anderson-kun?

When I thought about that, I just burst out laughing.

I can handle Ayumu. Better than anybody.

Yuu thrust that memo at Anderson-kun and firmly gripped my sleeve. She was a goddess. Although, I haven't heard someone say something like that since Ray Amuro.³³

It is like billiards. You must keep your arm completely straight.

Eh? What did she mean? My confusion must've shown on my face, because Anderson-kun offered further explanation.

“You can't think about it like taking swings in baseball. If you do, then after you throw the dart you'll end up pulling back your arm. Instead, in order to make sure your throw is stable, you need to push your arm completely out when you throw. We call this the ‘follow through.’”

I will teach him.

Anderson-kun came over to explain, but Yuu pushed him back.

Yuu helped me with my form, and I tried another throw.

Ah, it stuck this time. Let me try again!

Oh? That also stuck! Well, this was just splendid.

“Try to practice so you can throw the dart with the same posture and the same timing.”

Anderson-kun came over to comment once more, but of course Yuu just pushed him away again.

³³Gundam character.

I kept on going, and at around the time when I could reliably make the dart stick each and every time... *she* woke up.

“Umm~~... I want to try tooo~~...”

Dai-sensei raised her hand, her cheeks still a bit flush.

I felt a murmuring in my heart.

Well, she's drunk anyways, so she probably wouldn't do anything too crazy... right?

All the same, I was still pretty terrified.

“Okay~~. Come on up.”

Mihara was completely oblivious to the danger, though, and passed three darts to Dai-sensei.

“Aikawa-san... you're paying attention, right?”

Ahh, yeah. I just have to be careful that Dai-sensei doesn't completely destroy the dartboard or something with her throw, right...?

... What exactly was she asking me to do?

Anyways, I needed a bit of time to think.

I watched as Dai-sensei prepared herself like she was going to pitch a baseball...

“Dai-sensei, have you ever played darts?”

“Nope~~. But I was watching so it'll be okaaay~~.”

She was completely drunk. Her usual chuckles had changed more into cackles.

She lifted one leg up, held the dart aloft, held her arms close to her body, and a wind began to swirl around her.

The dart whizzed through the air... as if I would let her actually throw the dart like that!

I didn't really know how to stop her, so I ended up once again taking the worst

route and flipping up Dai-sensei's cute skirt.

As everyone's eyes turned to focus on me, Kyouko let Dai-sensei throw her dart. As expected, the strength behind the dart broke the dartboard, but fortunately Dai-sensei fixed it herself.

You had better keep people from looking over here, got it? All the while, Kyouko was telling me that with her eyes.

In order to make sure nobody else looked over there...

I flipped Haruna's skirt this time.

``Ukyuuuuhh!!''

Haruna's face flushed deep red as she held down her skirt.

Haruna was too busy to retaliate, and so in her place the owl's beak bore into my eyes.

``H-He's such a perv!''

I heard whispers all around me. I started feeling really uncomfortable... like a baseball team playing a particularly hostile away game... but just then my phone began to vibrate.

Ugh, again? I thought as I checked to see who was calling.

The time was... 6:05pm! Crap! I had completely forgotten about Saras again.

I hurriedly picked up.

``Hi, Saras? Sorry, I'm on my way right now!''

I spoke that into the phone as I put on my favorite jacket.

Chapter 3: Part 3

Outside, it was reaching the coldest part of the evening. I ran with my hands in my pockets, all the while wishing I had worn my down coat instead. Ahh, this really was a nice jacket, but it was seriously cold. Maybe I should've asked someone if I could borrow a scarf.

I waited for the traffic light to turn green, then rushed across the road like I was running a marathon.

The live house...³⁴ the live house... where was it? I knew approximately where it was because of the navigation tool on my phone, but I had never been there before.

Oooo... the wind was sure picking up...

I walked across the intersection, and prepared to walk along the road for a bit, but then I stopped.

Why...?

“Ohh, you've kept me waiting quite a while, Normerling.”

“It's like I'm a character in the King Arthur legend or something! Stop trying to change ‘my darling’ into random things. Also... what are you doing here?”

I saw Saras standing solidly and waiting for me right at the intersection. The strong wind swept her long black hair from side to side. She had her arms crossed, but that might have been because she was trying to shield her body from the cold.

She was wearing that punk-rock stage outfit of hers. She had a tight miniskirt on below, while on top she had on what almost looked like a two-piece swimsuit. Her belly button was completely showing.

Why was she outside in an outfit like that?

“Is ‘what are you doing here?’ how you plan to greet me? I was waiting for you. Hmph, you were so late that the chief has already gone home. I had wanted the chief to listen to my live music, too.”

³⁴(A live house is what they call the place where small bands can play live music. I'm not aware of a similar word in English so I'll leave it like this.

“Sorry. Did you wait long?”

“Yes. Ever since you told me to wait for you.”

... Ah. I guess I did say that. Right... she had called me earlier...

-

“Ahh, I'll definitely go! Please wait for me.”

“Okay! ... Understood. I will wait for you.”

-

Don't tell me... ever since that phone call, she's been waiting here in this freezing cold, dressed like that?

“Why here of all places?”

“This place provides me with a superb view. No matter what direction you come from, I will be able to see you from here.”

“Also, why are you wearing something like *that* out here?”

“You were the one who told me to wait. Do not worry, as I feel no pain from this. Love is something that can wait forever, my darling.”

To be honest, I was a bit annoyed. Each and every time we met she spouted stuff about love, and it was starting to grate on me. As a result, I couldn't help myself.

“Aren't you just doing this out of self-satisfaction?”

“Hm? My darling?”

“You weren't waiting here all this time because you love me... you were waiting here because you love the fact that you're able to wait here so long for someone you like. That's... just inconsiderate.”

For some strange reason, I was getting annoyed at a girl who was standing outside in the cold, worrying and waiting for me.

I was the worst. It's been so long since I've gotten angry at someone who

didn't deserve it like this.

“That's not what I intended to do! That's not what... but I apologize. It is just as you said.”

Saras had a lonely look in her eyes.

I wasn't expecting her to agree with me at all, so I had no idea what to say. I had thought Saras would start arguing with me, but...

“... I'm sorry too. I was wrong for being late... seriously, I'm sorry.”

“No, your point is quite valid. Certainly, your point is perfectly valid. I may have only been getting drunk on myself. That is not love.”

I took off my favorite jacket and draped it around Saras's shoulders.

“Anyways, let's go. I have no idea where the live house is anyways.”

“I really do apologize. From here on, I will try hard to fix my personali-”

Saras was getting depressed, but I interrupted her.

“Nah, you don't have to change.”

“Will you... forgive me for my arrogance?”

“Of course. Nobody is telling you to change. I'm just asking that you don't shift the blame on things that you did for yourself. You know, like blaming love or laws.”

“I may do the same thing again in the future.”

“So what?”

“Well... I was sure you had run out of patience with me and would leave... you certainly did catch me a bit by surprise.”

“Well... we're friends. It's not a problem. Something like this is easy to forgive.”

Saras put her arms through my jacket sleeves and pulled the front of it tight around her body.

“... I give you my thanks. Hey, my darling...”

“Hm?”

“Do you believe there is love between us?”

I saw a bit of insecurity leak into Saras's normally firm eyes. She was probably anticipating my response and a bit scared of it. Saras was frightened... she was a woman who always acted so high and mighty and would look down on everything... and she was frightened.

So, I...

“Yeah, I think so.”

I gave her a gentle smile.

“Hm?”

“It's not like you can only love a girlfriend or a boyfriend. They say that the love between family is the strongest kind of love, after all.”

“Ah, I believe that is true. I see... this love I am feeling is surely that kind of love. My eyes have been opened.”

“Well, it's good that you understand then. I hope we'll stay friends for a long time.”

“Agreed, my darling.”

“Ah, you're still calling me that...”

“Yes. In my mind, we are already dating, after all.”

“Geez, you just do what you want to, don't you?”

“Will you forgive me?”

“... Yeah, just do whatever. It's not like complaining about it will get you to change your mind. Just... know that I only think of us as friends. Is that okay?”

“Yes, of course... my darling.”

Saras gave me a satisfied smile.

Chapter 3: Part 4

When we got to the live house, we saw a huge crowd of people packed into that dim place. They all had both their hands up and were lightly jumping to the music.

The person singing was... Genkunrou! He was standing up on the stage half-naked with that Santa-like beard of his, gripping the microphone and belting out some hard rock.

Light danced all around the room while the beat of the drums blasted out over us like a machine gun... hey, wasn't that Tomonori on drums? Damn, she was fast on the drums...

And the guitarist was... Sera? So she could play an instrument other than the violin? Oh, right, she did mention that she played a lot of music back with the other vampire ninjas. I guess she didn't just play the violin, but also played in a band like this.

There was also another guitarist, and someone playing the bass, but I didn't recognize either of them. Genkunrou's old-fashioned, sophisticated voice echoed throughout the room.

... Was everyone in this place a vampire ninja?

“Well then, I will take my leave now.”

Saras parted the crowd and walked towards the stage.

Genkunrou seemed to see her, and raised his hand.

At that, the room fell silent. I could only hear occasional whispers circling the dark room.

Genkunrou reached out with one of his burly arms and pulled Saras up onto the stage.

The vampire ninja guitarist on stage handed Saras a red guitar while Genkunrou switched to bass.

When Saras grabbed the microphone, the whispers all stopped.

Once she saw that everyone had gotten quiet, Saras looked towards Tomonori while still holding the mic.

“Sorry. I'm quite late.”

“It's fine! We were just warming up!”

Tomonori, still in the same red dress, began twirling her drumsticks skillfully. Her legs were really spread out wide... you're going to show the whole world your panties like that, you know?

“It's difficult to trust a superior who can't even be on time.”

“Oh, I didn't know you trusted me in the first place, Seraphim. How surprising.”

Sera stood there in her revealing white dress, and Saras stood there in her rock outfit with her bellybutton showing. Suddenly, they both burst out laughing.

“Saras-chan, did you find the person that you wanted to invite?”

Genkunrou let out a good-natured smile and bowed.

I see. Tomonori was on drums, Genkunrou on bass, and Sera on lead guitar. Saras took guitar and vocals.

Saras took in a deep breath, and then let it out.

“Today... I learned the meaning of love.”

There was a tinge of loneliness in Saras's voice. She seemed to realize what she sounded like and let out a laugh. Yeah. This really wasn't like you.

“I realized that I was being a selfish, ugly girl. And because of that I caused a lot of people trouble. However, there was someone who said they loved me even though they knew all that.”

Some people in the audience whistled.

“I told that person that I'd try hard to change for him... but he told me I didn't have to. I was... happy.”

Saras closed her eyes and spoke from her heart. Maybe people realized how serious she was being, but nobody in the room said anything. They were just listening in rapt attention.

“Yes. Love is about how much you can forgive the other person. How much you can let them get away with. That's what I think... we have both reform faction and conservative faction vampire ninjas here. We've all caused plenty of trouble for each other in the past. Even so, we are all still vampire ninjas. We're a family, and if you love your family... then you will forgive them! I forgive all of you for everything!”

“Those are quite unexpected words coming from someone everyone calls the Water Demon. Is this a joke?”

Genkunrou let out a loud, boisterous laugh.

“If you think I look like I'm joking, then I can introduce you to a good optometrist.”

Saras looked... really cute right now. She was clearly having fun, and she let out an innocent, feminine smile.

“Kah kah kah. You love us, so you'll forgive everything, you say? There are people here who have been quarreling for a century... even killing each other. Yet, Saras-chan, you aren't joking...?”

Saras gave a resolute nod at Genkunrou's question.

Saras turned to look from Genkunrou to all the vampire ninjas in the crowd, and she spoke loudly and clearly.

“Yes, even then, I love you all! So, I want to become a woman who will forgive you for everything you've done and for everything you will do!”

“Saras-chan sounds serious. What exactly caused Saras-chan to change that much?”

“It started with a friend.”

Saras held out her hand towards Sera.

“And I made this decision because... because of my darling!”

Stop pointing at me! I heard people all around me whispering ``Darling? Who's that?" Ugh...

``Yeah! It's just like Saras said! This is seriously touching my heart!"

Tomonori was getting really emotional and she beat energetically on her drums.

``We are family. It may not feel that way right now, and it may be rather sudden to hear, but I'd like us to reach that ideal."

Sera began to play a riff on her guitar.

``I agree with Saras-chan too, I think. Well, let's just take it step by step."

Genkunrou plucked the strings of his bass and Saras's guitar also began to belt out an intense rock song.

``Alright, time for our first song! Rock and Roll Magic!"

Everyone in the audience began to scream as the up-tempo song began.

``If you want to die, step forwards!"

Saras's shout threw the crowd almost into a frenzy, and then she began to sing.

The song was in English, so I didn't really know what any of it meant, but I could hear the word ``love" here and there, so it was probably a love song.

Saras seemed to be the kind of singer who felt the music with her entire body. She swung back and forth on stage almost as though she was dancing, while she played her guitar.

At that point, the two people who had been playing the guitar and bass for Genkunrou and Saras before came back on stage and brought a strange thing with them.

What was that? Why were they bringing that weird cloth on stage in the middle of a performance and covering the microphone stand with it?

Tomonori brought her drumsticks down on the cymbals, and with the resounding *clang!* Saras tore the cloth off, revealing a grenade!

Wait, this is what they meant by ``Rock and Roll Magic"?

Now it was time for the guitar solo, it seemed. Sera plucked her guitar strings with great energy as Saras took out a deck of cards and let a person in the front row pick a card out.

The card picker then held up his card, showing it to the crowd. It was the ace of hearts. It's lucky he got such an easily recognizable card, considering how dark it was in this room.

Saras set the deck of now fifty-one cards down by her side, and took out another deck of cards. She began to sing as she shuffled the deck.

Saras also began to use the new deck of cards to play her guitar, in place of a pick. Of course, the cards began to scatter and fall down to the stage floor.

Soon, Saras was only left with one card, and showed off her rapid-fire guitar technique with it. Just as the song was reaching its climax, she threw the one card up into the air.

It was the ace of hearts.

The vampire ninja from the front row who had drawn the ace of hearts earlier caught the card, and now held up both his aces of hearts. The crowd went wild.

Next, a large stand was brought out on stage.

That was... wait, seriously? They were going to cut someone in half? In the middle of a song?

I scrunched my face up at this way-too-surreal spectacle in front of me, but everyone else was already so into it that they didn't seem to think anything was wrong.

``Okay, for our next song... Pop Magic!"

Sera's guitar riffs became even more intense. Her ponytail flew from side to side, and she swayed her entire body to the rhythm. Dammit... her guitar was in the way, so I couldn't get a good look at her breasts while she danced like that.

When Saras was just about to begin the next song, something was thrown at

her from the crowd.

It was a plastic bottle. Saras noticed it flying at her and tried to dodge, but the plastic bottle's cap was open, and the milk tea inside came raining down on her.



The people trying to pick a fight with Saras by throwing that bottle were none other than the same three girls with permed hair.

“You can forgive us for that, right?”

The three girls cackled, and Saras stopped the music.

This was bad... if this devolved into a huge brawl like it had back at the cheers war... where was that demon baron guy? Ah, right... Saras said he had already gone home.

God dammit... I really didn't want to deal with a huge fight right now...

But Saras's voice rang loud and clear around the room, shattering my fears.

-

“Of course! I love each and every one of you!”

-

It was a firm, strong declaration. Anybody in the world could tell that those words coming from Saras were absolutely sincere.

“T-That's impossible.”

“Conservative faction vampire ninjas are just so gross.”

“Hey hey, let's throw something else at her.”

The three of them parted the crowd and began to head towards the stage, perhaps planning to cause more trouble.

“Gross... certainly, that may be the case.”

Sera let out a small chuckle. Genkunrou also began to guffaw happily. They gave Saras warm looks, almost like two parents watching their kid grow up.

Saras reached out towards the girls.

“Come up on stage.”

The three girls smiled and went up on stage, probably thinking that their wish for a fight was about to be fulfilled.

``Well, let's begin."

Saras tossed the grenade that had been brought on stage earlier towards the three girls.

``Killing each other?"

``Kyahaha, how savage."

The three girls continued to try and pick a fight, but Saras remained perfectly calm.

``I want you to sing. That's just a microphone."

``Huh?"

``I'm saying that I'd like it if you help me sing the chorus."

Saras sent them a pearly-white smile, the kind I'd expect from Tomonori, and the three of them seemed to shrink back in awe.

They looked like they were about to talk back, but before they could...

``One two three four one two!"

Tomonori began to play her drums, kicking off the song.

The second song was Pop Magic.

It had a similar rhythm to the previous song, and they also did magic during the performance.

As they sang the intro, they successfully cut someone in half, and then the song entered into its climax.

The three girls just stood on stage, completely still. Saras waved her hands at them, though, and whether they resigned themselves to their fate or realized their situation, the one girl amongst them who had been the nastiest to Saras before began to add a great harmony to the song.

As expected from an internet idol... her voice was really cute.

The other two girls soon followed her lead and also began to sing the chorus.

Saras was a really intense singer, but the three girls had very pretty voices and mellowed out the song quite a bit.

I felt myself enthralled by the song, listening until the very end.

After the song ended, unrelenting applause and cheers filled the live house.

The three girls on stage scowled, trying to figure out what was going to happen next.

“Our next song is...” Saras glanced at the three girls.

“Ah right... let's sing your song!”

“Huh?”

A few pink-colored guitars were brought up on stage, and the three girls picked them up.

“But you were making fun of our song before.”

“Yeah! Can you even sing it?”

“Of course I can. Just like how you three could sing my song... yes?”

Ah, I see. That perfect performance of the chorus from before hadn't sounded improvised. These three girls knew Saras's song, and Saras also knew theirs.

Hmm... they sure fought a lot, yet they also acknowledged each other's skill.

Saras took a deep breath and shouted her feelings into the microphone.

“I also... want to sing cute songs!”

Laughter poured out around the room. I really couldn't imagine those words ever coming out of Saras's mouth.

“... I really... can't ever see that happening...”

The girls looked down at the ground and mumbled, but then lifted their heads again, seeming to have made up their minds.

They had clear, bright looks on their faces, as if the clouds had given way to sunshine.

Hm, well look at that. It seems that if they wanted to, even they could look like nice girls.

The third song was a cute-sounding pop song.

After the song finished, Saras and the three girls looked at each other. They didn't have any of the clear hostility that their faces had shown earlier. Rather, they were smiling, like they were old friends.

“I... really wanted to be like you! You're so strong, so cool, always ahead in the rankings, and completely invincible! I wanted to be like Lovely Kirara... and I tried wearing the same clothes, acting the same way, but I couldn't pull it off at all. I was so frustrated-”

-

“Well, doesn't that mean that you love me too?”

-

Saras let out a girly smile of her own. This was probably the first time those three girls had seen her smile like that. The girl who was talking suddenly swallowed her words, bowled over by how beautiful Saras was.

And then, her face flushed completely red.

“I'll forgive you. So, please forgive me too... and then, let's take each other's hands. We're all vampire ninjas here.”

“Sarasvati ... okay!”

“One more song then!”

Saras held up her index finger and reached out to the crowd. I had thought the crowd couldn't get any louder, but their frenzy suddenly heightened once more.

“But, that boyfriend of yours...”

“Yeah, he's clearly just a perv.”

“I would never be with a guy like that. Not even if we were on a deserted island, just the two of us.”

Kyahaha, they laughed. I heard the sound of the kindness circuit in Saras's head short-circuiting and burning out.

“Why don't you try saying that again?! You damn bastaaaardssssss!!”

A high-pitched ringing noise came from the microphone after Saras screeched into it, and she leapt to the side, throwing a punch at the three girls.

A fight was clearly about to break out, but the three girls just stood there smiling.

Geez... so it did end up like this. I prepared myself to intervene and try to stop the chaos, but suddenly I felt something vibrating in my pocket... a phone call?

The person calling me was... Orito. Whatever.

I put my phone away, and went back to Saras-... hm? My phone was still ringing.

I watched as Tomonori desperately held Saras back by the arms, and couldn't help but smile a bit.

I think... everything should be okay now. I decided to put my faith in Saras, and picked up the phone while walking outside.

“Yeah, hello?”

I lazily spoke into my receiver, when...

“Ayumu! Where are you right now?!”

Haruna's grating shouting rang in my ears.

“Did something happen?”

“They're gone!”

“Gone?”

“The gloomy necromancer and that girl with the weirdly huge boobs!”

Girl with... Kyouko?

What happened? I thought about it a bit... and then I opened my mouth wide in realization.

... I got tricked! I see... I see all too well now!

She came to the human world requesting a party in order to get Dai-sensei hooked on the idea. Dai-sensei loved parties, after all.

Then, she knew that Dai-sensei would get drunk off bubbly drinks and would fall asleep because of it.

She even tricked me into being her accomplice, so everything would happen naturally.

Everything... was so she could escape.

I'm such a huge idiot! I might've asked Yuu to watch over Kyouko, but when Dai-sensei got completely drunk I should've stayed and watched her until the end!

“Haruna, where are you right now? I'll be there soon.”

“Hueh? I'm in the bar.”

“Okay, just wait there. It would be really bad if you got taken away too.”

I hurriedly went back into the live house.

The live house had seemed ready to erupt into violence a few minutes ago, but now everything seemed to be under control.

“Well then... we will perform a love song for our final number. I dedicate this song to my beloved darling.”

... Suddenly, I felt it was a bit more difficult to rush out of here than I had expected.

I had no idea if she was looking at me or not, but I bowed in apology in Saras's direction, and began to shuffle my way out of the room. But then, Saras stopped her song.

“Oi! Darling! Where exactly are you going in the middle of my song? Why are you leaving?”

Suddenly, everyone's eyes were piercing through me. Of course, Sera and Tomonori were also both looking at me.

“There's a bit of trouble back at the mixer I was at...”

Love means you forgive the other for anything. Saras had said that before, so I didn't think there was any point in keeping the mixer a secret anymore. After all, she was-

“Huh? Hey, you piece of garbage darling. You have someone like me... and you dare to talk about a mixer? You damn good-for-nothing.”

.... Hmmmm? Hey, she was actually getting pretty pissed here...

Good-for-nothing! Good-for-nothing! The dense crowd of vampire ninjas began to chant that at me.

“Saras. You said that in love, you must forgive each other no matter-”

“I'm going to teach you... that forgiveness has its limits!”

I dashed out of the live house at full speed, with ear-shattering screams echoing behind me.

Bonus Project 2 ²

Orito: But really, Kyouko-chan and Rie-chan are pretty amazing. One has huge breasts. One has tiny breasts. It's like we're witnessing a power struggle between the two great breast empires-

Ayumu: Sorry, but I have no idea what you're talking about. Could you summarize?

Orito: Aikawa. If you had a choice, which one of those two would you pick?

Ayumu: Hm? Those two? Hmm... I don't know if I'd pick either.

Orito: Impossible! You'd reject two super-cute girls like that?!

Ayumu: Well, when you get murdered...

Orito: Let me ask the question in a different way. Which set of breasts do you prefer?

Ayumu: So it really was that! You damn pervert! ... But well, I guess I prefer ones that are a bit more on the conservative side...

Orito: Oh? Then what about Sera-san's breasts?

Ayumu: Those are the best. Works of art. Their shape is so perfect I'd swear they were molded, and when they swing back and forth-

Yuu: Ayumu thinks Sera's breasts are nice.

Ayumu: Y-Yuu! Since when have you been there?! Y-Yeah, I mean, sure I was saying that Sera's breasts are nice, but of course Yuu's breasts are also-

Yuu: Ayumu thinks breasts are nice.

Ayumu: No, that's not it! It's alright! Yuu's thighs and legs are also really nice! And that smallish bottom of yours-

Yuu: Ayumu just thinks... physical looks are nice.

Ayumu: Stop looking at me with sad eyes like thatttttt!!!



Is This a Bonus?

Orito: Honestly, Aikawa... I don't think you have the right to be calling anybody else a damn pervert anymore...

Aikawa Ayumu's Miscalculation

Ugh... that live performance certainly turned into a mess.

But it wasn't even Saras's fault... it was mostly Ayumu.

That disgusting man probably spewed irresponsible words all around again and even Saras is now saying disgusting things, isn't she?

Hellscythe-dono... Haruna... and someday even I would be poisoned by that man, and soon we all would start saying disgusting things, wouldn't we?

Well... it wouldn't be the worst thing in the world.

CHAPTER 4

Ehh? Really? Alright, Old Man! Another Class of Shouchuu!

By the way, when is the spotlight going to me?



Chapter 4 - Ehh? Really? Alright, Old Man! Alright, Another Glass of Shouchuu!³⁵: Part 1

When I arrived back at the mixer, I desperately looked around for Haruna, not even giving myself an opportunity to catch my breath.

I saw Haruna near the billiards tables on a sofa, still together with the owl. Next to her I found Dai-sensei, who was now collapsed unceremoniously onto the sofa and sleeping away. It was pretty obvious she had been put to sleep deliberately, considering how disheveled her clothes were. God dammit, that Kyouko...

“Haruna. Did Yuu come back yet?”

Haruna shook her head. Did Kyouko seriously run away and take Yuu as a hostage? Where could she have gone? I tried to think of places where you could hide in this world, but...

“Ah, Ayumu-san~~.”

“Dai-sensei... you're awake? Do you know where Kyouko is right now?”

“... Eh? Ah, umm... should be fine~~. Doesn't seem like she's gone far at all~~.”

“You know where she is?”

“Yup yuuup~~. Once you put on that bracelet, there's no such thing as privacy anymore~~.”

“That's great. Let's chase after them! Haruna, you stay here.”

“But... I...”

Haruna held the owl to her chest, looking concerned.

“Don't worry. Leave it to me.”

“D-Don't give me orders! I'm gonna look for the gloomy necromancer too!”

Haruna seemed to want to go save Yuu too. These were probably feelings

³⁵A type of Japanese liquor, often made by distilling sweet potatoes.

that hadn't shown up until the night of the school festival. Actually, they might've existed before, but that festival had made them much stronger.

“Ayumu-san, you want to `chase' her...?”

“Yeah, just tell me where Kyouko is right now!”

“Well, I guess I caaan, but...~”

Dai-sensei didn't seem all that hurried. This was a serious matter, so it was strange seeing her still being so carefree about it. I'd really prefer it if she showed a bit more urgency.

The place Dai-sensei led me to was... the bathroom.

“Okaaay~. Go ahead and chase her all you want~~.”

Dai-sensei laughed heartily. It seemed that all the soda hadn't left her system yet.

“Ehh... sorry then.” That bastard Haruna... they had just gone to the bathroom, hadn't they?

“Ayumu-san~~, you would be a pretty good person if you weren't such a huge pervert~~.”

“Dai-sensei, you may say that, but you're the one who tried to kiss me back there.”

“.....”

Hm? Why did she suddenly stiffen?

“Did I... do it?”

“Eh? No... we haven't yet.”

“Did you want me to~~?”

“Well, that's... no, if I wanted to I would've already done it, geez. Although, I've already flipped up your skirt and seen you naked, so...”

“... Naked?”

Crap. That slipped out. I had once seen Dai-sensei's nude body using those pervy glasses that could see through anything, but I don't think Dai-sensei knew about that.

“Your evil, dirty ways know no bounds...”

“Please, cut me some slack. I don't want to go to that dark place again. Here, look. I'll seriously do anything.”

I clasped my hands together, as if I was praying, and gave Dai-sensei a nice smile.

Ah... she was a goddess. A twin-tailed goddess.

“Hmm... okaay~~. Then I want you to kowtow here, and then do a handstand. Then, turn that handstand into a backbend, and with all four limbs stretched as faaaar as they can go I want you to yell `Dakisugakokkubo!’”³⁶

She was actually a demon! A twin-tailed demon!

Well... but, I *did* once see her naked.

First, I took to my knees and clasped both my hands in front of me, sinking my head deep to the ground. After that, I went into a handstand and tumbled over, falling into a backbend.

“Dakisugakokkubo!!”

My limbs were stretched taut like I was an angry cat, and my body was also completely bent back.

“So, now you'll forgive me?”

“I never said I'd forgive you~~. I just wanted to see that.”

... She was the devil. I'll have to be careful to never ever sexually harass her ever again.

I was still in my backbend position and wondering what to do from here when Haruna came back.

³⁶Read backwards, this becomes “Bokukko ga daisuki!” A bokukko is a girl who uses the masculine first person pronoun “boku,” and the sentence means “I love bokukko!”

``... Having fun?"

Gah! What destructive power! Those cold eyes of Haruna's just felt way more menacing today than usual.

As I looked away, Haruna brought her face close to mine.

``Hey... are you, having fun?"

``No... not really..."

``I was worried that Ayumu wouldn't be able to handle things alone, but what are you doing in front of the girl's toilet? You damn pervert! Perverted chocolate! If this were a few hundred years ago they'd burn you for being a witch!"

... Even though I'm a guy?

``A-Anyways! Haruna, they just went to the bathroom. You didn't have to get me all panicked..."

``Hueh? But it's already been a really long time! There's a limit to how long you can go to the bathroom for!"

Certainly, Haruna had a point. It's not like I could just go inside to check, though.

``Just wait here for a second!"

``Don't move, `kaay~~? Definitely not out of that position."

The two girls went into the bathroom. A little bit of time passed, and then...

``Ayumu!"

Haruna came back, her face pale.

Dai-sensei followed her out, looking as smiley and carefree as always. But...

``Well, looks like we were completely done in~~."

She was grasping onto Kyouko's bare bracelet in her hand.

I felt myself sweat even more.

Still in that damn backbend position.

Anyways, I stood back up and tried to think about what to do.

“Fiiiiirst, we have to punish Ayumu-san again~~.”

We didn't have time for that! She was probably too drunk to make rational decisions at this point, right? We had to go chasing after Kyouko and Yuu, but she just wanted to take me back into that strange place.

“Fumyahhh~~.” Dai-sensei suddenly collapsed.

I reached out and grabbed her body. Her forehead was warm. She was... still drunk, wasn't she?

... Well, I should probably be thanking God right now.

“... Are you alright?”

She didn't answer, completely asleep. Looks like we couldn't take Dai-sensei with us. Well, if it was just Kyouko, then Haruna and I should be able to handle it. We had beaten her once before, after all.

Dai-sensei seriously looked really young and cute when she was like this. When she was just sleeping, she seemed more like a middle schooler. Even if she was really a monster or a demon or whatever underneath.

I carried her back to the sofa next to the billiards table, which was quickly turning into Dai-sensei's makeshift bed, and laid her down on her side.

I saw Orito nearby, and beckoned him over.

“Hey, Orito. Look after Rie-chan for a bit.”

“Sure. Is she okay?”

“Yeah. She just needs a bit of rest, I think. I need to go look for Yuu.”

“Hm? Yeah, doesn't look like she's around anymore...”

Everyone looked all around the bar for Yuu.

“Yeah, you're right. Kyouko isn't here either.”

A sense of worry started spreading around the room, but I waved my hands and lightly chuckled, trying to dispel any anxiety.

“Ah, it's fine, don't worry about it. They probably just went for a walk. They're still not too familiar with the roads around here, so I'm going to go looking for them with Haruna.”

“Shouldn't we all pitch in and look for them together?”

Mihara mumbled that with a concerned look on her face. Certainly, that would be more efficient... but it was dangerous.

“It's fine. I'll be back soon.”

“Well, let me go with you then. I wanted a bit of fresh air anyways.”

Anderson-kun stood up while saying that, and then came over. He leaned in and whispered in my ear.

“If we're going to look for Eucliwood, then I'll help.”

He said that in such a sweet-sounding voice.

I should be able to trust Anderson-kun with the details. He *was* from the Underworld, so maybe he was a strong fighter. The more able fighters we had, the better.

I put my arm around Anderson-kun's shoulder and led him to a place away from everyone else.

“So, truth is, do you remember those serial killings around half a year ago?”

“Ah, yeah, those unsolved murders...”

“Kyouko... that masou shoujo... she was the culprit.”

“Eh? That girl? ... I see.”

Anderson-kun's eyes widened in surprise, but after that he put his left hand softly on my side, and then punched me as hard as he could with his other hand. Judging from the fact that he had held my body with one hand so I couldn't escape from the shock of his punch, he must be pretty used to fights...

“Anderson-kun! What the hell are you doing?!”

Orito had seen his punch, so he came over to hold Anderson-kun back, but I stopped him.

“It's fine. I'm okay... right, Anderson-kun?”

“Yeah, sorry for making everyone worry.”

Anderson-kun sent everyone a smile.

“What happened, Aikawa? Did you try to make a pass at Anderson-kun's favorite girl or something?”

“Shut up. Go away.”

Orito was trying to lighten the strange mood in the air, but I forcibly chased him away. Then, after I was sure it was just me and Anderson-kun again...

“I won't ask you why you brought such a dangerous person here. Instead, I punched you. Well, you probably have your reasons... but Aikawa, if something happens because of that girl... I'll never forgive you.”

The always-smiling Anderson-kun now looked gravely serious.

Ahh, all this just reaffirmed for me how much Anderson-kun loved this world.

“Sorry. I take responsibility for everything. I need a bit more firepower to beat Kyouko... so how well can you fight?”

Anderson-kun's expression returned to its usual gentle state.

“You know the ranking system the masou shoujo use for Megalo?”

“Yeah, I do.”

“I'd be around a D.”

Umm... D-class?

“Haruna, how strong are D-class Megalo?”

“They're the weakest. Masou shoujo like us could kill them barehanded.”

That weak? So he was basically a little stronger than a normal human.

“Sorry for disappointing you. But if people from the Underworld were as strong as A-class Megalo, we wouldn't need to make the Megalo in the first place. But hey, people do tell me that my basketball skills are way too good for a high schooler.”

What he said made sense. The people from the Underworld really couldn't do much about the masou shoujo. They invented the Megalo as a countermeasure and left all the fighting up to them.

“Do you have any special abilities? Like, Yuu isn't very strong but she has a pretty amazing power.”

“I can measure time and space very precisely. For example, I make sure my cup ramen sits for exactly two minutes, fifty-eight point three seven six one seconds before I lift the cover. Sorry for having such a useless skill.”

Stop looking so apologetic... it's not like you should feel responsible for anything.

“I'm sure you'll become a great basketball player.”

Anderson-kun's powers were geared towards observation. That's probably why they asked him to keep a watch on things in this world.

His skills didn't seem very useful in battle. I couldn't really bring myself to say that to him, though, but then he gripped my shoulders and spun me around.

And...

“Get going, you. You're the only one who can take responsibility for this.”

He gave me a firm push.

Chapter 4: Part 2

I ran together with Haruna through the city at night. Saras was probably right in the middle of her passionate live performance right now. I should probably prepare myself to get pushed around by her a lot once I go back at school.

“Haruna, are you sure they're here?”

“Of course! You saying you don't trust me?”

Well, Haruna definitely was one of the most random, strangest people I knew.

But I also knew I could count on her.

“Ayumu! It's that! That huge triangular thing!”

That was... I looked up.

Tokyo Tower. Kyouko was in Tokyo Tower? Why... were we going to that place again?

Right, hadn't someone said that there was a really good oden restaurant near Tokyo Tower?

Ahh, maybe those over there? I could see a few food stalls sprinkled around. I'd have to try them out sometime later.

Hm? That girl over there... looked really familiar...

I saw a girl dressed in Gothic Lolita fashion. Her face was hidden by the shop curtain, but that was definitely... Chris.

The enemy I had to beat was right in front of me.

I felt my brain buzz to life.

Right now... Kyouko was the priority.

Yes... Chris had been living like an old man. If I looked for her in places where old men liked to go, I should be able to find her. I just need to ask those old vampire ninjas I had seen earlier where the “old men hotspots” were around the city, and I'll be able to track her down again.

Right now, though, Kyouko was the only thing on my list. If I let her get away, I'd certainly regret it in the future.

In other words... I couldn't let Chris see me right now.

“Haruna...”

“Hueh?”

“Let's try to sneak past. We need to make ourselves completely invisible.”

I pulled Haruna by the hand, and shuffled towards Tokyo Tower in the style of a thief from a cheesy 80s movie.

It was good that there were a few trees nearby. We could use the space between those trees to sneak around.

We tried to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible as we continued on. All the while, I kept a watchful eye on Chris's back.

“Nnyuu?”

Swish The shop curtains opened, and a cute girl came out, looking all around her with a bottle of shouchuu in her hands. I felt my heart speed up, like I had just been shocked by a thunder bolt.

I suddenly hugged Haruna to me, and held her mouth with my hand even though she hadn't even spoken a word.

“Hey there, something wrong?!”

I heard the energetic call of the oden shop owner coming from inside the restaurant.

“Hmm, it felt like someone was watching Chris, but... old man! Another glass of hot sake!”

“Got it! Coming right up!”

Chris cocked her head to the side in confusion but then went back inside the shop once again. That was close. Way too close. Way, way, way too close.

“Hey, Ayumu.”

“What's up, Haruna?”

“Why are you feeling up my nice body right now?”

“Try to understand the situation we're in! We can't be bothering with that girl right now. You know that, right?”

“Hm, just this once then. If you try to touch my body again, then I'll show you my Hundred Step Divine Fist technique from the school of the White Flower Fist!”

We entered Tokyo Tower while I dealt with Haruna. We went up to the first observation deck, and I looked around. Maybe it was still a bit early, but there were still a few people scattered around. Unfortunately, the two people I was looking for weren't there.

We went up again, this time to the second observation deck. Still nothing.

Yuu's appearance was so distinctive that I could probably recognize her even if she was a kilometer away.

We went up again, to the special observation deck.

I saw two people on the floor.

They were both looking out of the glass onto the city below.

This was the second time I had found Yuu like this, in exactly the same position.

“Yuu?! You're safe?!” I ran up to her and called out.

Yuu gave me a firm nod.

Kyouko was right next to her, and was giving me a smile with both her hands around her back. When she smiled so nicely like that, it almost gave me the impression that she had done nothing wrong.

I sent her a fierce glare nonetheless.

“Kyouko. You completely tricked us, didn't you? However, not everything is going to go like you want it to.”

“My my, whatever could you mean?”

“I know why you wanted to go to the party.”

“Oh really? Please explain it to me.”

Kyouko gave me a teasing smile, and then slowly walked towards me.

I didn't put my fists up but just slowly walked towards Kyouko, keeping a wary eye on her.

Kyouko had some long, thin object wrapped in a coat. Did she steal a billiard cue or something? That would be...

“You wanted to go to this party because you were planning to escape all along. You knew Dai-sensei loved parties, and you also knew she really liked this world's food. The most convenient fact was that Dai-sensei got drunk off fizzy drinks. But, if you suggested she drink some, she wouldn't trust you, so you completely used me to get her drunk, and in the gap that was created you ran away.”

Kyouko clapped.

“Took you quite a while to realize that, didn't it?”

She gave me an angelic smile... give me more credit, dammit. Look at this proud smile I have on my face.

“Well, thanks a lot for the complement. Anyways, how exactly did you get that bracelet off?”

“Ahh, that bracelet is meant to seal the powers of a masou shoujo.”

As she said that, Kyouko summoned a small tornado in her palm. Her eyes bled red.

In other words, the bracelet hadn't sealed the powers she had received from the King of the Night.

“In any case, too bad for you. I won't let you escape.”

Kyouko's skirt swished as she turned around.

Her expression had been cheerful before... but it suddenly turned serious.

Her coat gently fell to the floor. I saw in Kyouko's hand... a single Japanese katana.

That was the same katana that had graced my entranceway for a short period of time. It was Dai-sensei's masou renki.

It was an item that allowed a masou shoujo to transform.

Don't tell me... I hadn't expected her to steal that as well.

Crap... I couldn't let her transform.

When a masou shoujo transformed, their strength multiplied like crazy.

“Nomobuyo, woshi, hashitawa, dokeda, gunmiicha, dei, ribura!”

Kyouko's clothes changed to a cosplay-like outfit right before my eyes.

She thrust Yuu's body at me, and then broke through the glass. The winter wind suddenly blasted through the observation deck, while Kyouko threw herself outside.

I could barely breathe as I protected my face from the strong wind. However, I still managed to find Yuu through my narrowed eyes and to catch her body.

The wind soon stopped, and the glass returned back to normal. Seemed like Kyouko had actually fixed the glass back up.

However, that glass was just going to get broken again... by me!

I punched the glass so that we could pursue Kyouko, using around 308% power.

Boing. My powerful attack bounced off the glass.

No, it wasn't the glass. It was like I had tossed a stone in a lake, and wave-like disturbances flowed through the air.

This was... a masou shoujo's barrier.

Why did she go out of her way to erect a barr-... ah! She didn't want us to

chase after her?!

“Haruna!” I turned around to tell Haruna to call the elevator, but even before I could...

“Come on, Ahomu ! Get on!”

The elevator door was already open. Also, I get the feeling she had gotten my name a bit wrong there...

As expected from a genius... is what I should say here, right? I pulled Yuu's gauntleted hands and dashed into the elevator.

The elevator was trying its very best to get us back down to the ground, but I felt myself getting really annoyed just standing there.

“Yuu, are you okay?”

Yuu didn't show any emotion as she nodded.

“She didn't do anything to you? She didn't hurt you?”

That bastard... did she harm Yuu in any way?

Do not worry.

“I think she's okay...”

Haruna had been staring at the elevator ceiling all this time, and she muttered with a dazed look in her eyes.

“How do you know?”

“Because that girl just wanted to come here. The gloomy necromancer was acting like a guide and led her here, right?”

Yuu gave a clear nod. What did that mean? Acting like a guide?

The elevator reached the ground floor, and we rushed out.

“That girl is too easy to read. Ayumu, remember, you beat that mist guy here before, right?”

I see. This was where the King of the Night had met his death at the hands of

Yuu. Kyouko was a fervent follower of the King of the Night. I see... she wanted to see where he had died?

“Yuu, you go back and stay safe with Anderson-kun and the others.”

Now that Kyouko had transformed into a masou shoujo, we couldn't hope to win against her with normal methods, and Yuu certainly wasn't suited for battle. I wouldn't let her be put into any danger.

I will go with you.

“It's fine. Haruna's here, so I'll be fine... please.”

I looked into Yuu's blue eyes with a serious look in mine. I was really worried that Yuu would end up getting hurt... and without saying that out loud, it seemed that Yuu understood. She seemed a bit reluctant, but she gave me a small nod.

“Of course!”

Haruna shouted as she ran with her ahoge jumping back and forth.

“Haruna, do you know where Kyouko's going next?”

“Around there!”

Around there... there wasn't anything but oden restaurants nearby.

“Nyah?”

The oden restaurant curtain flipped upwards, and Chris turned her eyes in our direction.

My damn heart was about to burst! My. Damn. Heart. Was. About. To. Burst!

Chris slowly turned her head, looking all around.

“Ayumu, where do you think your hands are?! You damn... mghfh!”

Haruna began to shout, so I desperately clapped my hand to her mouth and hugged her tight.

I waited for a brief opportunity before putting strength into my muscles and

using that explosive burst of power to dive in between a few trees.

“Hey there, something wrong?!”

The restaurant owner once again called out to Chris as she stood still outside the shop.

“Hmmm... Chris feels a bit like she's being watched again...”

Her cute voice was filled with suspicion. Crap... it was just a matter of time before she discovered us...

“Probably because you're so cute~~.”

“Ehh? Really? Alright, old man! Another glass of shouchuu!”

Chris seemed to be swayed by the simple flattery, and responded with a softened voice while heading back towards the other side of the shop curtain.

“Got it! Coming right up!”

T-Thank God. Nice one, old man.

The three of us lined up and tiptoed across the oden restaurant, looking like we were coming right out of the Sazae-san ending sequence.

That was way too close.

We didn't have time to fight with Chris right now. Also, there was a chance that Haruna and Yuu would get killed by Chris. I could deal with her later.

We couldn't let her discover our presence.

I kept an eye on the oden shop while we ran at full speed away.

If we didn't hurry up, we might lose Kyouko.

“Haruna. Could it be that you don't really concretely know where Kyouko is right now?”

“... Well, she's probably off sulking somewhere...”

“Anyways, Yuu. Please head back.”

I gave Yuu a worried look, but she began to walk back towards the mixer, leaving me a single memo.

Please take care of her.

Take care of her? I really didn't know what Yuu was feeling when she wrote that memo, but I couldn't help but feel it would be rude to shout after her as her back receded into the distance, her silver hair flying in the wind.

Alright. Now we just had... I suddenly saw Haruna stop, her ahoge standing straight up.

``I see. Now I see..."

``Did you figure something out?"

``She's above us!" Haruna pointed at the sky.

Above? I looked up at the black expanse over our heads.

There was not a single star up there in the night sky that stared back at us.

``There's... nothing up there."

I looked all around us. And I caught sight of two twinkles of light.

One was a girl in a cosplay outfit, holding a Japanese katana.

``That's Kyouko? Why is she still back there...?"

``When she strengthened that glass back there, she was trying to fake us out! She wanted us to think she was going somewhere far, but she was planning to go back to the tower!"

Certainly, I had thought she had run far away. Kyouko definitely liked to tease people... so Haruna's idea was certainly plausible.

Did we have to walk around Chris again? Ugh, she really might find us out this time...

Kyouko clashed with the other point of light.

That light was... the owl. The owl that Haruna had been getting along with

silently sent Kyouko flying with a kick to her back.

The owl was wearing a boy's school uniform... she was the masou shoujo's mortal enemy, a Megalo.

Kyouko, now transformed into a masou shoujo, began to fall right into Shiba Park.

“Let's go!”

“You don't have to say it every time! Let's go, Ayumu!”

I used every bit of my zombie leg strength and dashed towards Kyouko's crash site.

All the while keeping a wary eye on Chris, of course.

Chapter 4: Part 3

We were on the tree-lined boulevard running through Shiba Park. The road had lights and trees running along its side at regular intervals, leading right to Tokyo Tower.

Right in the middle of that road, Kyouko and the owl were battling.

The owl, wearing its boy's school uniform, violently attacked Kyouko from the air, while Kyouko knocked the owl's attacks aside.

“That big-breasted frea-”

I saw that Haruna was about to yell, so I restrained her, but I was too late. Kyouko seemed to notice us, and was clearly not happy about the situation.

This boulevard was great for walking, but Kyouko still ran down it. I had been running all night, so I really wanted to take a break on one of the park benches, but I couldn't do that right now.

Ugh, she was always causing trouble, wasn't she? That damn Kyouko.

“We caught up to you. You're not getting away again!”

“Ugh! Nobody likes clingy guys, you know!”

The minute Kyouko saw my face, she began to run.

However, her motions seemed extremely slow.

“Ugh! This again... ugh!”

Kyouko seemed annoyed as she desperately tried to move her legs. However, her attempts were almost laughable. She almost looked like she was trying to drag a ten-ton truck with her.

Now that I looked around, I noticed that everything around us seemed to be moving in slow motion.

The trees waving in the wind were moving suspiciously slowly, and the leaves falling from their branches seemed to almost be floating in midair.

Then, I finally noticed.

My own body was also moving in slow motion.

My body felt heavy. It was almost as though I was stuck in a swamp. I just couldn't move my body well at all.

A purple-colored wind coiled around my body. This was... the power of a Megalo.

Had this been the reason why Kyouko couldn't run very far?

“Haruna, go and catch Kyouko.”

It seemed that time was only slowed in the places that were covered with the purple wind. All the leaves blowing over from far away would only slow down when they reached a certain distance from us.

Haruna was outside the boundary of that wind. I thought she could cut in and block Kyouko's path, but...

“That... that can't be... you were a Megalo...”

Haruna had squatted down on the floor and was stiff with shock. Her ahoge also drooped down, and her eyes began to fill with tears.

Megalo were the mortal enemies of the masou shoujo. They were entities the masou shoujo sought to destroy.

The owl that Haruna had befriended... turned out to be one of those Megalo.

To Haruna, that probably came as quite a shock.

“Hoo?” The owl cocked her head in puzzlement at seeing Haruna's reaction. However, she soon realized that Haruna was acting that way because of her own purple wind, so she cancelled out her power.

Both Kyouko and I were desperately trying to move forwards, and so the minute the purple wind disappeared we tripped and fell forwards.

Luckily, I managed to catch myself. I've already had way too much experience with tripping forwards from too much momentum thanks to my fight with Dai-sensei.

Kyouko also got up quickly, but my fist was already catching her cheek.

My right hook hit thin air.

Tch! So close! If Kyouko hadn't transformed, that would've definitely hit.

``... I suppose I have to do it like this!"

Kyouko gripped her Japanese katana tightly and lifted the blade above her head.

My arm was cut off. I immediately went to collect that arm and reattached it.

I sent a spinning kick, and then a fist thrust right at Kyouko. Just like when I was fighting Dai-sensei, she lightly avoided my attacks.

Dammit! If Kyouko hadn't transformed, or if I could've transformed...

All of these useless, counterproductive ``what-ifs" just continued to run through my head.

Kyouko suddenly swung her blade grandly above her head, preparing for a big attack. This was my chance. I should attack while the enemy is trying to attack... I would use the timing I had learned from practicing with Dai-sensei over and over again.

286% power!

At that moment... the world slowed down again. I saw Kyouko's body twist in response to my fist. Ah, she got away again. That was a perfect punch too. Also, I could see tornados forming next to me.

This was Kyouko's vampire ninja ability. The tornados were made of blades, and the King of the Night had granted Kyouko this power. I really didn't relish the idea of those blades biting into me.

``Ukyuu!!"

Haruna moaned loudly. Hearing that, the owl hooted and cancelled out her powers.

Suddenly, the tornadoes grew huge, and bored into my behind. I suddenly couldn't put any more power into my legs and fell flat on my rear. When I looked up, I saw Kyouko's body vanish from my line of sight.

Crap! Did she get away?!

“Ugh, you need to just disappear!”

Kyouko's assassin blade cut off one of the owl's soft wings.

Kyouko probably really hated that slow-motion power. Fresh blood sprayed through the air and the owl plummeted down towards earth, feathers flying everywhere.

“Hoo, hoo.”

The owl's eyes narrowed in pain, and she seemed to be saying something to Haruna.

-

Sorry. Sorry, Haruna-chan.

The owl couldn't bear to see her own powers causing Haruna even the slightest bit of pain, though I wasn't the only one who had realized that.

Haruna had also realized it.

So, Haruna...

-

“What the hell are you doing, you stupid bastaaaaaaaaaaaaaarddddd?!?!”

-

She flipped out.

“Uaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!!!”

Haruna's legs were still shaking, but she ran towards Kyouko. Anybody could see that she was going to try to punch Kyouko right in the face with her right fist.

Kyouko could probably see that as well.

However, Kyouko let Haruna's full-forced punch dig into her cheek.

``Aaaaaaaaaaaaaagggggghhhhhh!!!"

Then, Haruna sent out her left fist.

Kyouko caught Haruna's fist in midair.

``You realize that owl is a Megalo, right?"

Kyouko pointed at the owl with her sword. The owl was on the ground, motionless. At Kyouko's words, Haruna's expression stiffened and she began to tremble.

``No..."

Big tears began to leak one after the other out of Haruna's eyes. Haruna wasn't crying for herself... she was crying for the sake of another.

``We have to extinguish the Megalo until there's not a single one left. You know that, right?"

Kyouko let out a teasing chuckle.

``No.... she's... she's just..."

``Actually, you should be thanking me. You probably wouldn't be able to kill her as you are now—"

Haruna waved her arms and feet around, almost as if trying to interrupt Kyouko.

-

``She's... she's my friend, okay?!"

-

A satisfied grin rose up Kyouko's face before she brought the hilt of her sword down strongly on the back of Haruna's neck.

Haruna crumpled to the ground like a puppet who just had her strings cut. Was it simply a coincidence that when she collapsed, her hands seemed to be reaching out in the direction of the owl?

“Okay then. All of the annoying intrusions have been dealt with.”

“... I see. You were trying to get Haruna worked up on purpose, weren't you?”

“Of course. Haruna is a genius who can predict my every move, after all! I can't just leave her alone.”

Attacking the owl and teasing Haruna... those must've all also been plots to get Haruna to stop thinking.

It looked like I was the only person left who could stop Kyouko.

My legs had fully mended, so I moved towards Kyouko.

“Weren't you the one who said that you would accept your punishment?”

Kyouko also slowly walked towards me. She readied Dai-sensei's mahou renki for attack.

“... Yes, I did. But... it was just too fun.”

Three more steps... three more steps from both of us and she'd be in attack range.

“What the hell does that mean?”

“I didn't know how many centuries they'd lock me up for. But during that time, the people who know me would disappear. There's a possibility that this entire world would disappear. Now is the only time I can enjoy the present! Tomorrow is the only time I can enjoy tomorrow!”

We both took another step towards each other.

“I love this world, with all its excitement. I reaffirmed that for myself today.”

“Who was it exactly that completely screwed this world up once before? Look at what you're doing now...”

We took another step towards each other. I put strength into my fist, and Kyouko also tightened her grip on her sword's hilt.

“But... more than that, I began to like Orito-san and the others. How can this world be so fun, and how did I grow to love it so much? I realized that it's

because the people living here are so wonderful. That's why..."

"That's why?"

"Could you... just let me go?"

540%! My fist rammed right into Kyouko's sword.

The blade didn't break. As expected from Dai-sensei's mahou renki, that damn thing was tough.

"Of course I can't. You already killed me once, and now you harmed Haruna and the owl this time too."

"Both of them are still alive. There's plenty of time to save that Megalo's life. It's not like I really want to kill them."

The tornado blades gouged into my stomach. At the same time, my fist gouged into Kyouko's cheek. Ahh, it looks like sexually harassing Dai-sensei really was worth it. The past me wouldn't have been able to get that hit in so easily.

"Ow... Aikawa-san, have you gotten stronger? That's rather annoying..."

"Thank you very much for the compliment. So, why don't you want to kill them? All these wounds you're giving me are fatal ones too."

"I know that Aikawa-san won't die no matter what I do, so I'll show no mercy to him. I don't hate Haruna, though... she's one person who I know won't forget me."

Kyouko's sword thrust into my arm. I ignored it and just hit Kyouko again.

"Sorry to break the news to you... but I'm pretty sure Haruna would end up forgetting you."

"... Suddenly, I feel like I want to kill you now."

I sent a kick at Kyouko, but Kyouko floated in the air like a piece of cotton fuzz. She danced on top of the leg I had thrust out and then kicked me right in the face. Sure, I could see her pure white panties, but there wasn't much else good about this state of affairs.

If I had to judge her strength using a human for comparison, I'd say that was a bit shy of 300%. My body rolled on the ground before hitting a nearby bench leg.

... So, what should I do here? My attacks haven't been landing at all for a while.

In other words... I couldn't stop Kyouko by myself.

Even if I had some kind of trump card to play here, even if I had more resolve and willpower, the difference in our power was just too great.

This was the difference between a masou shoujo and someone who wasn't a masou shoujo.

Haruna... the owl... a lot of people had already suffered because of Kyouko. If nobody paid her a nice solid punch, I'm sure she would just continue to be able to run from the punishment she deserved.

Wasn't there anybody who could give her a firm beating?

No... I couldn't rely on anybody here.

If I couldn't even beat her, then I wouldn't stand a chance against Chris.

I'll do it... I'll beat her!

I stood up, and faced Kyouko again.

“You sure are like a zombie, Aikawa-san... quite tough.”

Kyouko readied her sword, but I ran at her, planning to tackle her with my left shoulder.

Followed with a jab from my left fist.

“Ahah, did you really think you could hit me with such slow attacks?”

Kyouko laughed and sent a grand swing down at me with her sword. This was my chance.

This was the same thing I had practiced so many times with Dai-sensei.

You attack your opponent, drawing out their attack. And then, you counter them.

605%. I heard the air around me crackle as I pushed my muscles past their limits, and with explosive force sent an attack at Kyouko so fast that I'm sure even Dai-sensei wouldn't be able to follow it. However, the attack was warded off by a barrier.

“Ah, as I thought, you tried that. Did Ariel-sensei teach it to you?”

... That was a failure. I guess I really couldn't use that move on a transformed masou shoujo?

It seemed like the kind of petty dodging and countering techniques that Dai-sensei had taught me wouldn't fly with opponents who were just in a higher class.

The masou renki broke through my shoulder. It sliced right down to my heart, like it was cutting a piece of cake, but then the blade stopped.

Kyouko tried to pull the blade out, but the blade wouldn't budge.

“Let go! I... I have to run away. I have to... keep my memory alive...”

And then, I slapped Kyouko across her cute face.

I didn't use my zombie powers to push my muscles past their limit or anything. This was just a hard slap from Aikawa Ayumu, ordinary high schooler... or from a friend.

I reached out again, and grabbed her by the collar of her cute masou shoujo costume.

“You're just been blabbing the same exact thing for a while now. Haven't you forgotten about someone?”

“A-Aikawa-san... please don't touch my breasts.”

Kyouko put her hands over mine. However, a zombie's full strength was comparable to that of a masou shoujo. As if I would let go now.

“I hate you. You're the one who once killed me. So...”

Kyouko tried to muster strength in her arms to peel my hands off, but I just pulled her closer to me, to a distance where I could probably kiss her if I wanted to, and...

-

“That's why... I won't forget you for as long as I live. Well, although I guess technically I'm already dead.”

-

I sent those insanely embarrassing words sailing right for her. So, how was that? Even effective against masou shoujo, right?

“Aikawa... san.”

“Listen to me, Kyouko. It can be a hundred years, or two hundred years, but I'll never forget about you. Neither will Yuu or Haruna, or Dai-sensei or Anderson-kun. Is that not enough for you?”

Kyouko suddenly burst out laughing.

“Are you trying to be cool or something? That's so embarrassing, ugh...”

I just doubled down and showed Kyouko an even more serious face.

“I don't want to say embarrassing stuff like this either. But... that's really how I feel. They might be embarrassing, but they're exactly the words I want to tell you.”

“... Aikawa-san.”

Someone came up from behind Kyouko and embraced her.

It only took one look at that ahoge to realize that this was Haruna. Ah, she was awake? “Hoo. Hoo.” The owl perched on Haruna's shoulder also was trying to say something.

To recover from such horrible wounds so quickly... as expected from a Megalo.

“He's right! You not satisfied with us or something?! Don't screw with us! You better say sorry! I won't forgive you otherwise!”

Haruna put her arms around Kyouko's neck, almost like she was trying a chokehold. Kyouko released the masou renki and put her hand on Haruna's arm. Meanwhile, I took my hands off Kyouko and pulled her sword out from within me.

“Eh? Forgive...?”

Kyouko blinked repeatedly at Haruna's unexpected words.

“... Kyouko, I know what you're trying to say. Think about the people you've killed, though. Just like you, there were plenty of fun things in this world waiting for them... but you took that from them, and now you just want to have fun for yourself? Don't act so spoiled!”

“... That's... true. I... forgot what I had done.”

“You might not have understood this a while ago, but now that you've seen how fun this world can be, you understand, right? And you're strong, right? You can face whatever life throws at you.”

“... I can't keep running away from punishment for my crimes, can I?”

“Yeah, you can't. Can you please just promise me this time?”

“Yes... I... I don't feel any doubt anymore. I can promise you. I'll properly accept my punishment this time.”

“Suffer through for all the things you've stolen from others... and if you get through that, then...”

“Then come and hang out with us. I still... I still haven't asked you how you got those things that big.”

“Ahah, so Haruna thinks she'll still be the same in a few hundred years?”

“Hoo hoo. Ohhh?”

The owl looked really interested right now!

“Ukyuu!! No! That's not what I meant!”

Kyouko bowed her head to Haruna and the owl.

“I'm sorry for doing such horrible things. Please forgive me.”

“So you *can* give a proper apology.”

Haruna put her hands on her hips and gave a cocky smile.

“But... thank you very much. This feeling... just having one person waiting for you makes you feel so warm.”

Kyouko cancelled out her transformation and showed us a smile. It was a satisfied, happy smile, and her eyes began to slightly tear up.

“....” In contrast, Haruna looked just a bit down.

Someone was waiting for Kyouko.

Now that I thought about it, there might not be anybody back in Virie that was waiting for Haruna.

Maybe it was just my imagination, but that might explain why Haruna's ahoge was drooping so low right now.

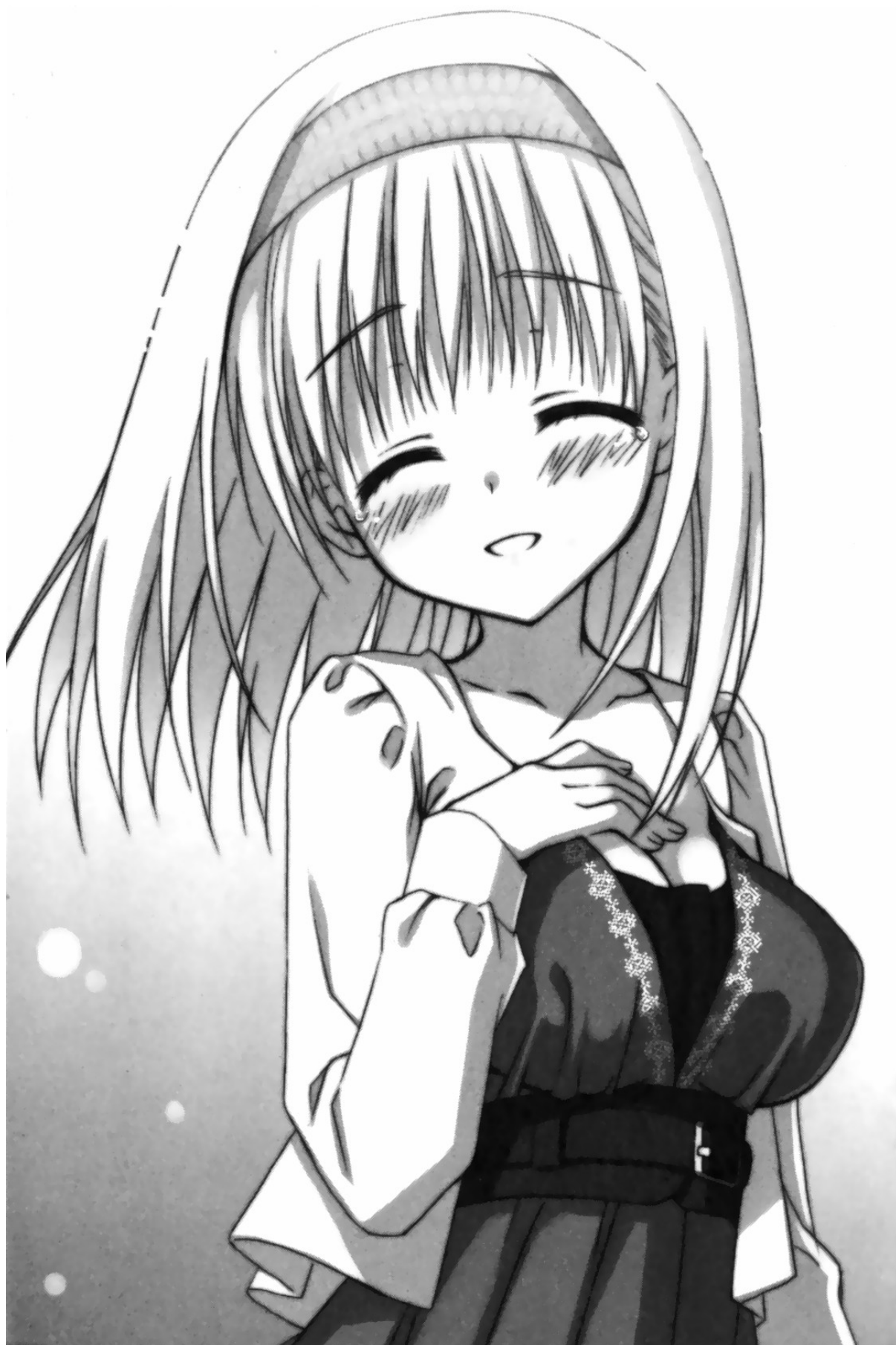
However, realizing what she was doing, Haruna suddenly waved her head from side to side.

“We're going back! I don't like the cold!”

Haruna grabbed Kyouko's hand.

“Hoo hoo. Yea, let's go, hoo.”

... That owl definitely just spoke perfect Japanese there.



Chapter 4: Part 4

On our way back to the mixer, we passed by the oden restaurant again and saw a huge crowd. There were way more people there than before, and they were all laughing and seemed to be having a good time.

Chris... wasn't there. I didn't know whether that was a good or a bad thing. Well, I kind of understood her movements now, so all in all this was a good day.

... Hm? Was that Sera over there?

I see. Those were all vampire ninjas. All the vampire ninjas were here at the oden stall. Had they chosen that stall for the after party?

What the hell... at least some of them should've come and tried to help me out back there... ugh.

“Haruna, Kyouko. You two head back first.”

“Hueh? A-Ayumu! ... Ugh, Ayumu just does whatever he wants, doesn't he?”

I left Haruna, Kyouko, and the owl behind, dashing towards Tokyo Tower.

After all that, Sera had to take care of that demon baron for me until the very end. I had to thank her before I forgot, and also ask her about what had happened after I had left.

“Hey, Sera-”

I spoke up to the ponytailed beauty in front of me, but...

“Aikawaaa, what are you doing~~?”

Tomonori came up behind me and whacked me on the shoulder, still wearing that rather revealing red dress of hers.

“Whatcha talkin' bout, Aikawa~~? Also, let's play Kabaddi !”

“Tomonori, I'll get to you soon, so just wait there for a bit.”

“Ugh, Aikawa, what the hell~~... ah, let's play sepak takraw !”

Now, Tomonori playing sepak takraw in her skirt is something I'd definitely want to see... oops, that was close. I almost got completely swept away by Tomonori's energy. ``Next time, okay?" I replied before speaking up to the girl in the white dress sitting there eating oden.

``Sera, sorry for leaving that guy to you until the very end... did everything work out?"

``Do you have so little faith in me? There is no need to worry."

``Sorry, that was a stupid question. I'm sure you handled everything perfectly."

``Naturally. So... did Hellscythe-dono and Haruna have fun?"

``Ah yeah... thanks. Is the vampire ninja meeting over?"

``Yes, without issue. The chief also seems quite satisfied."

I had left the demon baron completely to Sera, but it seemed like she had gotten through it pretty well. As expected from Sera. She was so reliable.

``You should come to the mixer too."

``No thank you. That sounds disgusting. I don't have many fond memories of mixers."

``It's not like I have any dirty ulterior motives or anything. Yuu's also there, so why not just go?"

``That's true. Well, if Saras wants to go, I will go with her. Would that be alright?"

Saras? Then, I realized that Sera was looking directly behind me...

There was an evil black aura emanating from behind me. How did I not notice that before?

``Ah, look at the stupid face that decided to show itself... my darling."

The black-haired beauty was standing there was like a wall. I could feel my heart withering away... maybe her anger was just that overwhelming. When she looked down at me with her arms crossed like that, I just saw her as

nothing but a huge wall.

“Y-Yo, Saras. Sorry about earlier. There was a bit of an emergency...”

Saras let out a sigh.

“I know already. I'm sure you have your own things to take care of. Ugh... because of my piece of crap darling, I feel like I've become so much more forgiving...”

As I thought, she was a really nice, patient person. She might have some selfish, unrelenting sides to her personality, but... I see. When she said she would forgive me for anything, she seemed more pleasant than annoying. Almost like I could get away with saying anything. Alright, this was my only chance.

“Thanks. By the way...”

“Hm? What is it?”

“Do you want to go to the mixer too?”

With Saras like she was now, she'd probably just laugh it off and then give me the okay... is what I thought. But I was an idiot.

I could've sworn that I heard the sound of something in Saras's heart breaking, like the snap of a rubber band.

Was she going to be forgiving or not?! Make up your mind, dammit!

“I am not so generous as to be able to love mixers!”

Ah, I see. I was asking her to like something that wasn't me, so she couldn't be forgiving.

“Hm? Sarasvati isn't going? Let's go, Aikawa! To the mixer!”

Tomonori hopped up and down with a full-fledged smile on her face, and she took me by my hand.

“Eh? Ahh, okay...”

I glanced at Saras, and... gyah! She looked like a volcano just about to erupt!

“... I changed my mind. I will join you as well.”

“What?!”

Saras almost jumped at Sera's resigned words.

“Ayumu, if we're going to go, then let us hurry.”

Sera linked her arm with mine and began to walk, causing Saras to panic.

“W-Wait, you all... I never said that I wasn't going!”

It seemed that Saras had been diffused, and she confiscated my arm from Sera.

“Now we're perfectly even.”

I didn't really know what she meant by that, but it seemed that Sera had saved me.

Yeah, Sera really was pretty reliable.

We met up with Haruna and Kyouko on the way. Ugh, we were almost at the darts bar too... but suddenly I felt a bit of déjà vu from a girl passing us by and stopped.

“Hey, piece of crap darling. You must have a lot of courage to be ogling another girl in my presence.”

“No, that's not really the reason I stopped...”

I muttered that without looking Saras in the face, and Kyouko explained to me why I was feeling a bit strange.

“That girl was at the mixer, wasn't she?”

I see. Yeah, she was right. I had the feeling that I'd been seeing a couple of people in the past few minutes who had been at the mixer.

I suddenly came to a realization and fished out my cell phone.

On the display, I saw... it was twelve minutes past seven.

The time limit on our reservation had been seven o'clock. The mixer had

already ended.

“Ah, sorry everyone... looks like the mixer is over already.”

“Ehh, but we already came this faaarrrr~~...”

Tomonori sounded disappointed, and Haruna whacked Tomonori on the head.

“Don't give up so easily! We won't know until we go!”

“Hoo. Hoo.” The owl seemed to agree with Haruna.

“Yeah! That's right! As expected from Master! I'm seriously moved!”

These girls were pretty simple when it came to things like this. Sera seemed to agree with that sentiment.

“Well, I think it's over though.”

“Yeah, it probably is.”

“Okay then! Let's face the evening sun and run! There's nothing better than a marathon in the middle of winter!”

... The sun has set already, you know. Tomonori took off running, and Haruna followed her. I just found this all kind of bothersome, but someone started to push me from behind.

“Shall we go, Aikawa-san?”

Kyouko stood behind me, her angelic smile back on her face. Well... looks like there's no helping it anymore.

Shall we go for a run?

Chapter 4: Part 5

We made it back safely to the darts bar.

Sera still had that calm, regal expression on her face, while Tomonori was in high spirits. Saras just looked grumpy.

Seeing these three beauties with me, Orito quickly dashed over.

“S-Sera-san! Aikawa! You are a truly wonderful friend!”

Orito started to pant heavily at seeing Sera in her white dress.

“Disgusting...”

Sera crossed her arms under her full bosom and curtly turned the other way.

There weren't many people left in the bar. I could see Orito, Mihara, Hiramatsu, Anderson-kun, Dai-sensei, and Yuu. Almost everyone else had already gone home.

“Sera, Saras, sorry. I guess the mixer really is over.”

“Actually, I am quite relieved.”

“Yes, it would be unbearable to see my darling staring lustfully at other girls.”

I didn't know if they were being honest or just considerate. Either way, I was relieved. As for Tomonori... she seemed already fully satisfied from her marathon.

“We've been waiting for you. Had to convince the shop owner to let us stay until you came back.”

Mihara winked her false eyelashes at us.

“Kanami, yo!”

“Yuki-chan! What's up with that getup?!”

Mihara seemed really shocked at seeing the seductive red dress that Tomonori was wearing.

“Fufufu... I look pretty girly, don't I? Maybe it'd be cool go to school like this next time~~. Ah! Aikawa! That was a pretty good little pun, wasn't it?!”

“Not..... really.....” I hadn't even noticed that “cool” and “school” was supposed to be a pun.

“You're so mean, Aikawa~~.”

A few conversations started here and there, but only Kyouko and Dai-sensei remained silent.

Dai-sensei was just smiling, while Kyouko glanced awkwardly at Dai-sensei, unable to look her in the eye.

Anderson-kun appeared next to me and put his mouth close to my ear.

Don't get so close, dammit. My heart's racing now.

“We heard what was going on from Eucliwood.”

I glanced towards Yuu, and saw that Yuu was expressionlessly watching Kyouko and Dai-sensei.

“I see. How did Yuu explain things to Dai-sensei?”

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Ayumu will settle things and bring her back. I am certain.

-

Anderson-kun passed me a memo with that written on it in cute gothic-style handwriting.

Kyouko bowed her head, looking quite docile in front of Dai-sensei.

“I'm sorry for making you worry. I'm okay now.”

“I wasn't worried for even a minute~~.”

Dai-sensei glanced at me.

“I had faith in him, after all~~.”

Both Yuu and Kyouko nodded at Dai-sensei's words.

Seeing that all was well with them, I turned to Orito and the others next. There were a bunch of thousand-yen bills heaped up on the table, and Orito and Anderson-kun were doing a count.

“Okay, two thousand yen each please.”

Orito reached his hands out towards Tomonori's seductive breasts. Tomonori brushed his hand away.

“I just got here! I'm not gonna pay!”

“Ahaha, it's okay Yuki-chan.”

Mihara tried to pacify the raging Tomonori, while I took my wallet out. Together with Yuu, Haruna, and Kyouko's share, I owed around ten-thousand, but...

“Hey Orito... are you sure you have enough?”

I didn't think we could get away with only two thousand yen a person at a place like this.

“I'll make up the difference. I thought something like this would happen, so I brought three years worth of New Year's money.”

After saying that, Orito took out a big pack of ten-thousand yen notes³⁷... wait, how much are you planning to pay exactly?

“Here, let me cover half too.”

Anderson-kun said that, and also began to rain ten-thousand yen notes down on the heap.

“Nah, it's fine. It's fine, really. I'm the one who said it. Also, everyone else has gone home already, so it's not like I can go around asking people to pay up anymore.”

Orito laughed the same, annoying, idiotic laugh he always let out.

³⁷He calls the ten-thousand yen notes “Yukichi-sama,” in reference to Yukichi Fukuzawa, the person on the ten-thousand yen note

“I'll pay some too.” I saw a grumpy-looking Mihara take out her wallet and dump its entire contents onto the table.

“Me too. I only brought thirty-thousand yen though.”

“... Eh? We... don't have enough. Sorry... I... only have this...”

Hiramatsu came over and added three thousand yen to the pile.

“It's fine guys. Just knowing you wanted to pay is enough. Just let me try and be the cool guy right now.”

“What's so cool about paying for everything yourself? A good-looking guy paying just one yen is still way cooler than your million yen, you know.”

“Yeah. Actually, that's like the opposite of cool.”

Mihara and Anderson-kun chimed in as they returned Orito's money to him.

“Ah, I'll pay~~.”

Dai-sensei suddenly took out a wad of bills from her pocket so big that I thought we were in a Hollywood drama. There must've been millions of yen in that...

“Today's my treat~~. You can be sure to treat me next time, `kaaay~~?”

Dai-sensei gave us a full smile.

“S-So cool...”

Mihara and Anderson-kun said that simultaneously.

Naturally, I agreed with them.

Well, because of Dai-sensei's frightening generosity, all of us were able to get away with only paying two thousand yen a person. With that, the mixer ended without incident, and we caught a train back to our home station from Roppongi.

We walked along the street like a group of students coming back from a field trip, though our group slowly wound down in size.

“Hey, useless darling. You really were listening to my song, right?”

“Yeah, sorry, my bad. You'll sing it for me again sometime, right?”

“Eh? ... A-Ahh... o-of course!”

Saras flushed red, and wrapped an arm around my shoulders like a good buddy. Yuu pushed Saras from behind.

That is my spot.

Yuu squeezed between Saras and me, and just looked straight forwards.

Just being able to see this side of Yuu made today worthwhile.

We soon came to an intersection, when...

“Well then, my darling. Today was quite a full, fun day. I give you my thanks.”

“Yeah, it was fun! Next time, invite me from the very beginning!”

Tomonori and Saras lived in the same building. This is where we would split ways.

One person left, and then another. Our group grew smaller and smaller. At the next intersection, Orito and Hiramatsu both stopped.

“Alright, we're going this way from here.”

“... Aikawa-kun... I'll see you... at school.”

Hiramatsu waved at me. I managed to see a different side of Hiramatsu today too.

“Yeah. Oh, and if you think Orito's trying to pull something strange, just give me a call.”

“Fufu... I will be fine... Orito-kun is... a nice person...”

We shared a small chuckle together. It seemed that Hiramatsu had fun today too.

“Yeah, Aikawa. I'm a nice person!”

“Yeah right!”

As if running away from my retort, Orito dashed off into the night.

“Ah, we'll be fine. Don't worry. I'll be going with them after all.”

Mihara gave Hiramatsu a bit of a push from behind, and began to set off after Orito.

“Hm? You're also going this way? Don't tell me... you want to go home together with me?”

Something sparkled in the middle of Orito's glasses.

“I-I can get back home this way too! I'd worry about Tae-chan if she had to go home alone with an animal like you, so that's why I'm tagging along! Get your head out of the gutter!”

Mihara smacked Orito across the cheek. But, hmm... she didn't seem all that upset...

“Well, take care then.”

“Ayumu! Let's go!”

I followed Haruna's voice while waving goodbye to Orito and Hiramatsu.

I watched as my friends' shadows receded into the distance. An indescribable loneliness seemed to fall onto me from the night sky.

“Actually, now that I think about it, where does Anderson-kun live?”

The only people left were me, Haruna, Yuu, Sera, Kyouko, Dai-sensei, and Anderson-kun.

“Hm? I live near Hiramatsu.”

“Eh? Then why didn't you go with Orito and the others back the-”

Anderson-kun interrupted me by pointing forwards. Following his hand, I saw Haruna and the owl. I see. As long as Haruna didn't part with the owl, Anderson-kun couldn't go back.

“Sorry. I'll say something to Haruna...”

“It's fine. I was planning to follow you back to your house anyways. I have to post up this flyer.”

Anderson-kun showed me a flyer with **Basketball Team Recruitment!** written on it. Anderson-kun, you... thanks.

“Sorry. And thanks.”

The road narrowed a bit, and we began to walk in pairs.

Haruna and the owl were in front, with Kyouko and Dai-sensei following. Anderson-kun and Yuu were next, while Sera and I brought up the rear.

“Hey, Sera. The chief is revived, so your mission is complete, right? Are you still going to be staying with us?”

“Yes... the chief directly gave me a new mission. I am to help out and keep watch over Hellscythe-dono.”

“I see. That's great. Okay then... looking forward to having you around.”

“... It was you, wasn't it?”

“Hm?”

“You were the one who proposed that to the chief, weren't you?”

I couldn't answer. I couldn't decide whether I should lie or tell her the truth.

Sera let out her usual snort of laughter.

“Thank you. Well, I think any debt though has already been repaid with that Saras incident back there.”

Ah. That's what she meant when she said we were even.

“Did I maybe intrude too much?”

“No, I am grateful. I... have grown to like this lifestyle. I have grown to like living with Haruna, with Hellscythe-dono... with you.”

“Well that's surprising. And here for all this time I thought you hated me.”

“Didn't I already say it before?”

“Say what?”

“My affection points for you are already at their maximum.”

Sera's usually cold expression softened a bit when she said that. She gave me a teasing smile, almost looking like a mischievous child in the style of Haruna or Kyouko.

“Eh? Okay then, can you call me oniichan from now on?”

“... Disgusting. Do you know where they sell paper shredders big enough to fit gross people like you? I'd be interested in purchasing one.”

She wanted to chop me up! I had said that as a joke, so she really didn't have to take it that seriously...

We slowly walked along the road. We passed by the school, and when we were just a little bit away from my house Dai-sensei turned around to look at us.

“Well then, Ayumu-san. We're going to head back now~~.”

“Ehh, Dai-sensei should just start living at Ayumu's place!”

“That would be just lovelyyy~~, but I have too much work to do.”

“Maybe I can live there?”

Kyouko joked around. It didn't seem like she was being serious at all.

“Y-You stay away!”

“Ahaha... yeah yeah. I know. Ah, right. I completely forgot.”

“Hm?”

“You wanted to know Chris's weak point, right?”

Ah, right, that had been my goal for today. Right. I had gone to the mixer so I could hear about Chris's weak point.

“Just tickle her.”

“Huh?”

“That person told me. If Chris gets her sides tickled, she'll curl up and quiet down, like a cat that just got its neck pinched.”

The King of the Night could control this mist and then teleport things using that mist.

For him, tickling Chris seemed like a simple thing, but... ugh, that sounded hard.

If I could do something like that then I'd probably be able to beat her.

So I guess she really didn't have any weak points. God dammit...

“Ahh yes... a long time ago we used to tease and tickle Chris quite a lot~~...”

Dai-sensei clapped her hands, as if remembering something.

I had to touch her sides, huh...? I guess I'll keep that in mind, but it seemed impossible.

Kyouko showed me her healthy-looking, pearly white teeth, and then bowed her head.

“Thank you for today. It was really, reaaaaally fun! Maybe... when my punishment is over and I can come out once more... you'll play with me again?”

It looked like she was paying me a lot of respect, but she probably was just too embarrassed to thank me to my face, so she was bowing.

“Yeah, sure.”

I instantly answered.

“My my~~. Are you sure you should be making promises like thaatt~~? Who knows how many centuries it might be~~...”

“Yeah, I know. I'll wait for you. I don't care if it's a hundred or a thousand years... you won't try to run away anymore, right?”

“I won't! ... Okay, goodbye. Aikawa-san.”

``Farewelllllll~~."

Dai-sensei flew into the air, taking Kyouko with her.

Not leaving me with enough time to ask Kyouko why she had those faint tears in her eyes.

Chapter 4: Part 6

We soon reached our front door, and I spoke up to Haruna.

“Hey, it's time to say goodbye to the owl.”

“Huh? Why?! She's gonna live here with us, of course!”

“Hoo hoo.”

Haruna squeezed the owl close to her and shook her head frantically. Anderson-kun didn't seem to know what to do as he watched this scene. Anderson-kun was a good guy, so I doubt he would be aggressive here...

“Haruna.”

“No! This owl... she wants to be with me too! Right?”

The owl looked back and forth between Haruna and Anderson-kun.

“S-hoo-wy.”

And then, she flew out of Haruna's thin arms.

“Ah!” The owl stopped in Anderson-kun's arms and spread her wings out wide.

“Hoo.” Haruna looked down at the ground, as if trying to avoid eye contact with the owl.

“W-Why... why won't you stay with me?! I thought we were friends... I thought we were friends!”

Haruna looked like she was about to burst into tears at any moment, and Anderson-kun really didn't seem like he knew what to do.

“Haruna-sensei, this one also has her own duties. She's a Megalo, you know... so she can't live with you right now.”

“I won't accept that! She can just do her duties while living with me!”

Anderson-kun scratched his head upon hearing Haruna's selfish words.

The one who did what had to be done, however... was none other than the owl herself.

“Hoo, hoo.” The owl hooted sadly, seeming to want to say something.

Yuu tapped Haruna on the shoulder.

Does Haruna-chan want to come to where I live?

It seemed that Yuu could understand what the owl wanted to say.

Haruna stared me right in the eyes, and didn't seem to know what to say.

“Hoo.” **Just like Haruna-chan, I also have a family and a place to go back to.**

“Shut up! Idiot! I don't care anymore! J-Just go away!”

Haruna turned her back on Anderson-kun and the owl. It seemed like she was sulking.

“Bye, Aikawa. I'll see ya again at school.”

“Yeah. See ya.”

“Hoo, hoo.”

The owl also said goodbye, but Haruna just continued to sulk.

Geez. I turned back to look at Haruna, and I saw...

A small girl crying waterfalls of tears.

“Huh? A-Ah, crap! There's something in my eye! That owl flapped her wings way too much!”

Haruna couldn't stop the huge tears from flowing. Of course, even if she could, her voice gave her away.

“Haruna...” Sera spoke up, sounding a bit worried.

“Again...” Haruna looked down at the floor and covered her face with her hand to cover her tears, and then shouted with sobs mixing in with her voice.

“I... I finally made a friend! But it always ends up like this! I get... I get left

behind!"

Haruna... I had heard that she was always alone back in the magical world Virie. But... it seemed like it wasn't the case that she couldn't make friends.

Haruna always acted so selfish, domineering, and arrogant... but she definitely wasn't a bad person. Actually, she always tried her very best so that everyone could have fun together.

“Haruna...”

“Ayumu, are you going to stay with me forever? Is the gloomy necromancer going to stay with me forever? Of course not! Nothing in this world lasts forever! I don't wanna be alone anymore, though! I... I don't wanna!”

Yuu pulled Haruna into a hug.

Parting does not mean it is the end.

Yeah, she was right. No matter when and no matter where everyone was, friendship never changed. As long as that friendship remained a constant, everyone was sure to meet again.

“Gloomy... necromancer...”

Haruna lifted her head up. Her cute face was just a mess.

This is not a farewell, it's a `see you later.'

I felt like I could see something akin to motherly affection in Yuu's youthful face.

Haruna took Yuu's memo and wiped away her tears.

“Okay... yeah, you're right! Even if we have to part, then we'll just say `see ya later'! But... she... she already...”

Haruna seemed to have gotten a bit of her energy back and wanted to chase after the owl, but her ahoge was still drooping.

I took Haruna by her hand and began to run.

“Let's go tell them.”

``Ayumu?"

``Let's go tell Haruna's friend `see you later.'"

``Okay!"

Haruna nodded, a smile on her face, showing the confident expression I was used to seeing from her.

``Well, Hellsythe-dono. It's getting quite cold outside. Perhaps we should go back."

Maybe she was trying to be tactful, but Sera took Yuu and went inside the house.

Still holding onto Haruna's hand, I ran along the night roads for a bit before speaking up.

``Haruna..."

``Hm? What's wrong, Ayumu?!"

Her voice was overflowing with her usual energy. Her ahoge jumped happily from side to side.

``You don't have to worry... I'll be with you forever. Even after death, I'll be with you."

``Hueh? ... T-That's... you mean..."

Haruna blushed, and her ahoge stood straight on end. In response, I gave her my best zombie smile.

``Yeah. We're family, after all."

That was a cool thing to say. Seriously, I said something insanely cool just no-

``Ugh!" O wow ow! What the hell?! Why are you pulling on my ear?!"

``Haruna, what the hell are you doing?!"

``Stop getting my hopes up in weird ways!"

Hey! S-Stop that...!

“Anderson-kun help meeeee~.”

For some reason, Haruna was now angry at me, and I called out at that tall back I saw in the distance to protect me from her relentless attacks.

The owl on Anderson-kun's shoulder turned around.

Haruna let go of my ear and ran towards Anderson-kun.

Ugh, what the hell had Haruna been angry about? I really hadn't the faintest idea, but I ran after her.

“I... came to say goodbye.”

“I see.” Anderson-kun seemed to understand what Haruna wanted to say, so he let the owl down off his shoulder.

Haruna squatted on the ground and hugged her knees, so that she could get herself to the same height as the owl.

“Don't get the wrong idea though. This doesn't mean we won't see each other again.”

“Hoo hoo. Yeah.” The owl gave a small nod.

“So, this isn't farewell. Got it?”

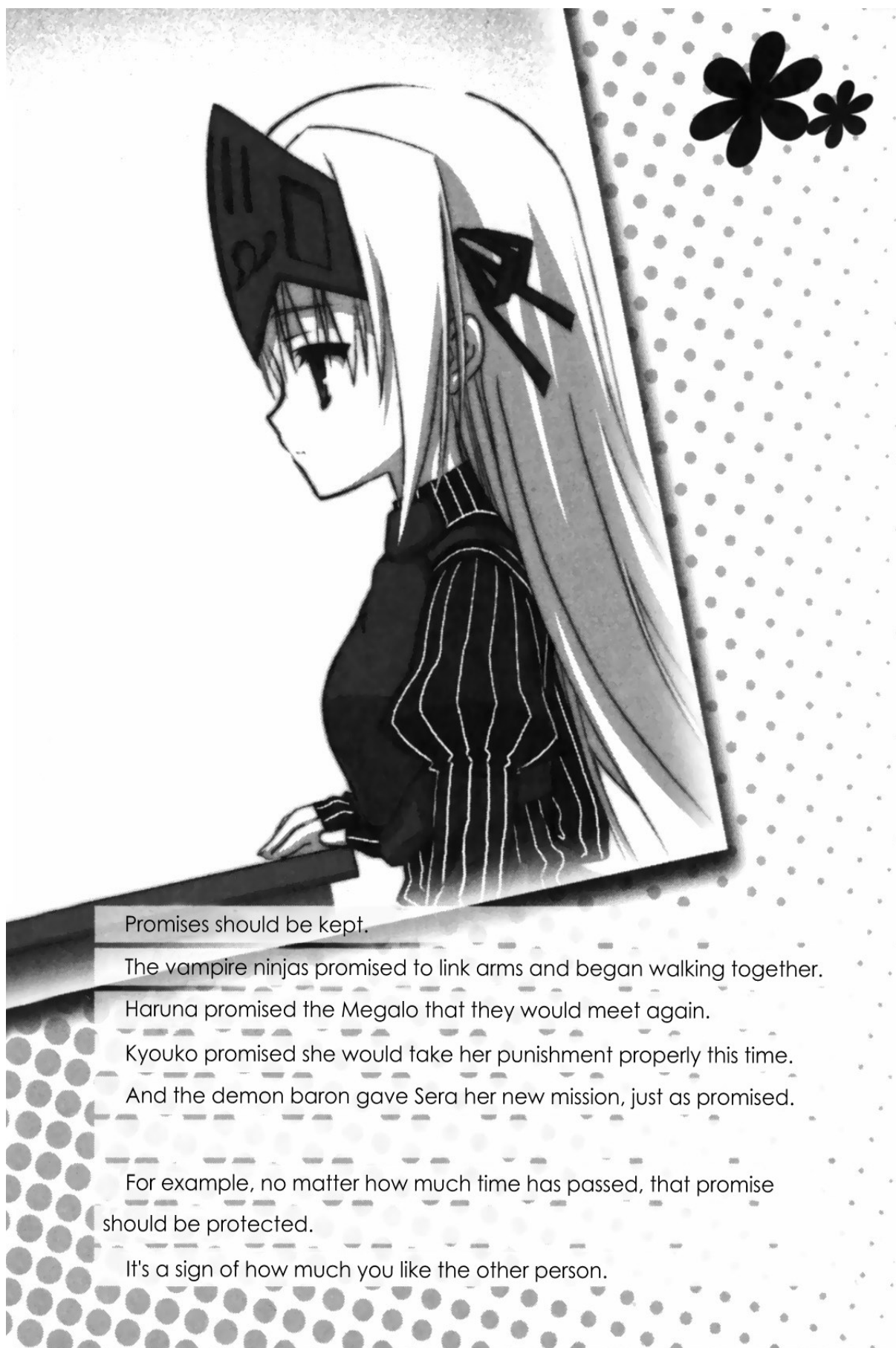
“Hoo hoo.” The owl nodded again and again.

“So... see ya later.”

While saying that, Haruna lifted up a hand. The owl also lifted up one of her wings.

I don't know if Haruna realized it or not, but she was now making the owl's “let's be friends” pose perfectly.





Promises should be kept.

The vampire ninjas promised to link arms and began walking together.

Haruna promised the Megalo that they would meet again.

Kyouko promised she would take her punishment properly this time.

And the demon baron gave Sera her new mission, just as promised.

For example, no matter how much time has passed, that promise should be protected.

It's a sign of how much you like the other person.

Epilogue - It's Aikawa Ayumu's CD Debut. What's the Name of his Song?

So to sum up, the results of our little adventure tonight were... finding out that Chris is ticklish and that she likes to visit places that older men go to.

... So what?

You could fill an entire novel with how much stuff had happened today, but the results were pretty anticlimactic, weren't they?

Well, no. Saras had fallen in love, and Haruna had made a Megalo friend.

Those were pretty important results too, weren't they?

But, ugh...

I still had no idea how to beat Chris.

Wait. Maybe there was something. There was still a way to beat her.

I see... she had stolen all the magical energy from Haruna, so maybe we just had to do the same thing and steal the magical energy from Chris.

I guess to do that, we'd have to ask Haruna to make one more of those magical energy suction devices...

“I can't make something like that anymore.”

“Why not?! You're a genius, right?!”

“I live my life like a flash of light. Well, let me just ask you something then. Say you're feeling really good today and you can draw the Mona Lisa perfectly. Do you think you could do the same thing tomorrow? It's kinda like that.”

“... When you put it like that... I guess it's impossible.”

Yeah. I guess... there wasn't even a point in trying then.

What should we do?

How could we get Haruna's magical energy back?

Wait... now that I remember it...

“Hey, Yuu. You were the one who sucked up Haruna's magical energy to begin with, right?”

Nod.

Yuu gave us a nod, a slightly guilty look in her eyes. Well then...

“Can't you just do that again? This time, you can snatch the magical energy from Chris, not from Haruna.”

The emotion I felt back then was laughter.

“Okay then! We just have to make the gloomy necromancer laugh!”

Like that, we began a question-and-answer tournament.

Haruna, Sera, and I sat there looking at Yuu nervously, each holding our own sketchbooks.

Tap tap. Yuu tapped the table twice.

We had our first question.

What has Steven Seagal been really obsessed with lately?

That was hard.

“Got it!” Haruna-san answered. Let's take a look at what she came up with and try to go from there.

*Finding a small autumn.*³⁸

That was a pretty narrow time window!

I had no idea whether her answer was funny or not, but this was a contest to make Yuu laugh. Had that answer hit the mark?

That was not bad.

So close!

³⁸Reference to a Japanese song/nursery rhyme by Hachirou Sato.

“Okay.” Now it was time for the very intelligent Sera's response.

Hijacking cars.

There's another word for that you know! We call it “carjacking!”

That was also not bad.

Oh? It seemed that Yuu's sense of humor was pretty lenient. Well then, in that case, I'll just...

“Got it.” I raised my hand.

UNO.

How was that? Think about him with that grim face of his, putting down a card and shouting “UNO!”

“.....”

No response at all!

“Got it got it got it!” Haruna's turn.

All-back hairstyles.

That wasn't recent at all!

I love that.

I wanted her to say that to me! I wanted Yuu to tell me she loved *me*!

“Alright.” Sera was next.

*Telemarketers from FLET's Hikari.*³⁹

I could already see him threatening them!

Love that.

Shoot! I'll do better this time!

Tap tap. Yuu tapped the table.

³⁹Cable internet company.

... Dammit. Looks like the topic was going to change.

It's Aikawa Ayumu's CD debut. What's the name of his song?

Now the topic was me?! Ugh, because of that, it was going to be tough for me to answer this one...

“Got it!” Haruna raised her hand energetically.

Your Checkbook, Your Signature, and Me.

That smelled like a con from a mile away!

That was close.

“Here I go.” Sera didn't raise her hand but gave her answer.

I've Been Hitting Bunker Shots Since Birth.

Was I born in a desert?!

That was okay.

Okay, now was my chance...

“Okay. Umm...”

I was going to bet everything on this response!

I'll Become Like Figure 1.

Love that.

Allrrrrrrrrighttttt!!!

In that way, we played a few rounds, but Yuu had been training by watching variety shows each day, so we couldn't get her to laugh.

“I guess we really can't beat Chris.”

I muttered that, but Yuu tapped the table twice.

I saw one memo had been placed on the table.

And this was written on that memo:

I know of somebody.

“Someone who can beat Chris? Not Dai-sensei?”

Yuu nodded, and wrote another memo.

In this way that Chris is the strongest masou shoujo, this is the strongest person in the Underworld. Before we had the Megalo system, she repelled the masou shoujo invasion by herself.

Ahh... wait, she was that strong?! There was someone like that?!

She is called the S-class Megalo in Virie.

“Eh, S-class?! That legendary...”

Ah, right, Haruna was pretty knowledgeable about Megalo rankings, right?

“Is that really that amazing?”

“It's way beyond amazing! We need multiple masou shoujo just to be able to take down an AAA-class Megalo. If she's even stronger... you could say that even multiple masou shoujo couldn't beat her.”

“That *is* pretty amazing. Could we make contact with this person?”

Yuu gave me a firm nod.

If we go through Anderson, we should be able to meet her.

I see. I guess Anderson-kun was acting like a pipeline between this world and the Underworld.

“Well, let's head for Hellscythe-dono's world tomorrow then.”

I agreed with Sera's idea, but Yuu shook her head.

She is in this world.

“What did you say? Well, that's convenient. Why is she here?”

She is making doujinshi in this world.

..... She was an otaku? The S-class Megalo, the strongest person in the Underworld, was an otaku? Yuu had said ``she," so I imagined she was like Yuu, but... eh? Seriously?

It was almost New Year's Eve.

I could hear the footsteps of Winter Comiket coming closer and closer.

-

``Yuu, by the way. Why did you go to the mixer anyways?"

I wanted to make sure no strange bugs latched onto you.

Afterword

Good afternoon, everyone. This is Kimura Shinichi. How was the fifth volume?

I thought that I'd shine a spotlight on some of the sub-heroines in this volume, and so the story turned out like this.

Ayumu and the others played instruments in the third volume, Yuu put on a live performance in the fourth, and Saras sang in a live house in the fifth... and so, the music goes on and on.

I always think of something.

-

You have clothes (cosplay), food (Sera and Haruna's cooking), and a place to live (the house Ayumu and the others are staying in).

So, what comes next? Sound, of course.

-

I feel that in my line of work, I can express sound to even those who can't normally feel it.

Sure, sometimes people say ``Oh, this sound is pretty refreshing, like I'm listening to a babbling brook or whatever," but that's not the only thing I'm talking about.

For example, take the title of this series: ``Kore wa Zombie Desu ka?" Depending on who's reading it, the intonation and feel of it changes. This is where ``sound" comes into play, I think.

``Pops, mum, Rodriguez!"⁴⁰

Didn't the last five syllables there come out sounding like English? You probably felt the same sound as I did there. Please be my friend.

In other words, I want to emphasize this nice quality of sound throughout the work, and use it to maintain a fun atmosphere.

⁴⁰A reference to Red Yoshida, a Japanese comedian who had a bunch of one liners. This was apparently one of them.

That's my dream. I may still be inexperienced, but I want to completely pack this work with sounds that are pleasant to the ear when read.

Anyways, even as I'm hammering this chapter out, I'm listening to music the entire time. Lately, I've almost exclusively been listening to Western music from the eighties , but I also occasionally listen to radio talk shows while I work. One day, a spot of good news came for a talk show and music enthusiast like me.

An extremely generous anime producer graciously sent me an invitation to a ``Sora no Otoshimono Youth Hit Paradise" live event.

So, I'd like to borrow some space here to express my gratitude for that invitation.

Seriously, thank you very, very much!

So, about that live event... it was really good. I really think it's impossible to understand that sense of harmony from across a screen. As a huge seiyuu fan, I couldn't help but just smile ear-to-ear the entire time.

There were a lot of people performing, but everyone was great. There were also Nomizu Iori and Mina in cosplay... *cough cough*. Of course, all the singing was insanely exciting too.

Oh right, there was also Natsuo Kamon's song, ``Yuke! Yuke! Kawaguchi Hiroshi" at some point, but before they played the song, there was a video message from Tatsuo Kamon herself! Wow, these organizers sure know how to liven up the crowd, I couldn't help but think.

Either way, in the first place...

-

It was quite a rare sight indeed to see all those panties flying about at a live performance.

-

I can't talk about too many of the details here, but I just want to say one thing!

That was so, so, so fun!

At one point Suzuki Tatsuhiki picked up one of the panties that were raining down on stage and wore it over his trousers, pretending to be a huge perv, and Hoshi Souichirou put on an afro while singing ``Chiku Chiku B Chiku." All this just got the crowd revved up to a whole other level, and made everything even more exciting.

The atmosphere was so comfortable that I almost wanted to bring my laptop and work there.

But nah, that would've been the rudest thing for the other people in the audience, I guess.

-

In general, I'm really bad at working in a world devoid of sound.

Although, ever since I was a kid, I've also been pretty bad with movie theaters. ``Sound" also had something to do with that... but seriously, there's a volume that's comfortable for me and there's a volume that isn't, you know?

Of course, I really wanted to see all the pretty images on the big screen! I hated not being able to control the volume, though, and I barely went to movie theaters as a kid.

But even then, a few days ago I went to the TOHO Cinemas in Roppongi.

After the live event, they were showing Sora no Otoshimono and Omamori Himari all night, and I was invited to that too.

The showing would last until five in the morning, so I was afraid I would just fall asleep, but I found I didn't feel sleepy at all.

All that pervy stuff in Omamori Himar-... *cough cough*. All those wonderful scenes, and the panties in Sora no Otoshim-... *cough cough*. When you saw such wonderful scenes up there on the big screen, of course you'd get excited.

That day just reaffirmed my belief that anime are awesome.

Whooo I want to see Zombie up there in the moving pictures too ! I said to my supervisors, but...

``Shut up and behave," they told me.

But but but... I really don't like quiet...

-

Anyways, I'm happy to say that it's already been announced that Kore wa Zombie Desu ka? is getting an anime adaptation!

It's because of all of you getting this book that I've been able to get this far.

Seriously, seriously, thank you very much! I'll try to repay this debt by trying all the harder from here on out! Please be kind to me from now on as well.

Starting with the cover of Dragon Magazine, we produced a drama CD, a manga version, and our Twitter account grew. All this is thanks to the powers of Kobuichi-san and Muririn-san.

If those two hadn't done the illustrations for this series, then I really doubt we would have gotten this far.

The illustrations for this volume were also wonderful. Please, I'd be thrilled if you took a look at the feature page illustrations in Dragon Magazine. It's another wonderful drawing, different from the one opposite the title page, and it leaves quite a deep impression.

I really want to just express my heartfelt thanks to those two.

Thanks for pulling me along all this way!

Next, there's Sacchi-san, who draws the manga version.

Sacchi-san's drawing of Kyouko was so cute that she managed to work her way into Volume 5. I had originally planned this volume to be all about Saras and Haruna.

Whenever I meet together with my supervisor Morioka-san after we get some more roughs from Sacchi-san, we always agree on one thing: we're really lucky to have him.

Thank you. Seriously, thanks for everything.

I think my job is to take all those cute illustrations and make cute characters out of them. I hope to continue bringing you more weird but cute girls from here on out.

Saras's illustrations were also so good that I started having her say ``my darling," and wanted to show different sides of her personality during this volume.

It got to the point where I wrote ``my darling" so much that whenever I went to the udon restaurant or the fish market near my house, and they thanked me with the standard ``maido ari," I started hearing ``my darling."

I'm planning to release the next volume in autumn, but until then I want to depict all the different sides of the heroines in Dragon Magazine and other places, so I hope you warmly watch out for that in the meantime. Please take care of me in the future as well.

- April 2010, Kimura Shinichi

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